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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

WHITE AS SNOW.

By EDWARD GARRETT,

AUTHOR OF "OCCUPATION OF A RETIRED LIFE," "CRUST AND CAKE,"

AND

RUTH GARRETT.

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WHITE AS SNOW.

INTRODUCTION.

CHRISTMAS EVE, and real Christmas weather. The snow had been softly falling all day, slowly shrouding the wide valley below our windows. No business nor duty had called me from home, and I fear I had been rather idle, especially in contrast to the industry of my sister and the maids. What a cipher a man feels at times! I had just written a few letters to some old friends, though I had little to say, beyond "A merry Christmas to you, and as many more of them as you may need to put you in perfect tune for the anthem in our Father's house." I think it is one of the solemn happinesses of Christmas that we may be quite sure that anybody who had ever cared for us, gives us a thought then. I like to fancy that the angels in heaven know that it is Christmas. Perhaps they know whose last Christmas it is. That knowledge would not make them sorrowful as it would make us.

I grew to feel a little sad sitting by the fire in our comfortable parlour. I can remember nearly sixty years. Sixty years is a wide landscape of life. And I have heard it

said that wide landscapes are saddening. It is one thing to look down a lane ended by a great well-to-do farm, where you can hear the young people singing in the parlour, and can see the labourer and the serving lass courting across the stile, and know that every living thing there, from the grandmother in the seat of honour to the blind kittens in the straw, are all well cared for and comfortable. It is quite another thing to stand on a hill, and survey house after house and hall after hall, some happy enough, but others with dark stories hanging over them, and the rest that you do not know at all, while far away rises the smoke of some great town, where you know there are dark lanes and closes, aye, and gay flaring mansions, saddest of all, where sin and sorrow, and death, physical and spiritual, seem to have it all their own way. And that is like a long life. I can recall many faces that I shall never see again—that have utterly gone out of my group in this crowded world, and I do not even know whether the grave has yet closed over them. Our lives touched once, flowed together a little while, and then parted—is it for ever? I could not help thinking of all the wicked pleasures going on even on Christmas—of what some people must feel when they see the holly and the mistletoe and of the homes that are sad for their sakes to-night.

Ruth came in and sat down, at last. I heard some mysterious remark about the pudding being fairly put on to boil, but I don't profess to understand what that could mean. At any rate, she sat down in the peculiarly comfortable way of people who have done their work, and earned their rest. And she folded her hands, and she said, "Well?"

It was a "well" interrogative. I somehow felt that it was an attack; and to discover where my weak point was, I answered by another question:

"What is it?"

"I want to know what you are bothering yourself about," she said: "something that does not concern you, of course!"

"I'm thinking the world is a dreadful place," I replied, quite solemnly.

"Possibly," she returned: "to give your thoughts a practical turn, you may go on and ask yourself whether it is better or worse for your being in it."

"You never seem to feel the awfulness of these matters," I said, in a reproving spirit. "I'm sure if we only try to realize the weight of our responsibility it is quite overwhelming—quite paralysing!"

"If we have to carry a certain burden to a certain place in a certain time," said she, "I think we are to be blamed if we waste ever so long straining ourselves to heave it into the scales, to find out the exact pounds and ounces. Our business is to move it."

"But it is such a puzzling world," I said, returning to my starting-point. "Some people seem to be placed where it is so easy to be good, and some where it is so hard!"

"I don't think so well of human nature as to believe that it finds it easy to be good anywhere," said Ruth; "in its natural state it turns its very blessings into curses that weigh it down, like Tarpeia's shower of gold."

"Then, if human nature turns its very meat into poison," I said, "what of those who have only poison to begin with?"

"If you think half a minute, Edward," she answered, "you would see that, according to your putting of things, nobody can be worse off than the utterly ruined. But I won't avail myself of that logic, though it is sound enough. I only say, show me somebody who never had a chance, and then I'll begin to think what is to become of him."

"There's a great deal of silly sentiment in the world," she went on; "good people are too ready to stand and let bad people tell them that they would have been the same if they had been in their place! We may be very pitiful towards the fallen, but we want to help them up, not to let them pull us down. When anybody wants to excuse any sin by any circumstance, you'll not have to look far to show them somebody who conquered that very circumstance. It is but false charity which ignores the loving-kindness that is pledged to set a way of escape beside every temptation. Haven't we both known men who have kept on the honorable, patient tenor of their way, through trials as cruel as any that ruined scamps can plead in their extenuation? Haven't we known women who have preserved their tempers sweet, and their lives happy and useful, under crosses that are supposed to be the agents that have made other women like nothing so much as vinegar, pepper, and mustard, mixed on a steel knife!"

"Yes, Ruth," I said; and then I added, musingly, "You and I have certainly known some very good people."

"No more than anybody else," said she.

"I wonder how it is that we are so prone to remember the evil and to forget the good," I remarked.

"Because we like to remember what will keep us in

countenance, and forget what will put us to shame," said she.

"Warning and example are both intended to edify," I observed, "and yet I think that example tends most to edification."

"You can seldom get the one without the other," returned Ruth. "The wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest."

"Ruth," I said, presently, "suppose that we should try to recall some of the triumphs of God's strength in human weakness which we two have seen in our day. Let us try to take these lights from under their bushel, and let them shine before men, so that they may see these good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

"I'm afraid people would only call them very commonplace stories, Edward," she answered. (By this deprecatory remark I knew she meant to consent.) "They would say they did not see anything wonderful in them. White is just white, Edward, and if it is clean, folks say, 'So it should be!' but when it is stained they say, 'No wonder, see what a dirty world it is!' Let us blame it all to the world, Edward—it is what you are always inclined to do. But just please to remember that the world is not as the devil would like it to be. It is flattering him to fancy that he has it all his own way. He may go splashing about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour, but there is a hedged way behind Christ's cross, where he cannot come, though he may frighten the pilgrims there with his roaring, and sometimes may befoul those that he cannot tear!"

"Ah," I said, "we must never forget that any good-

ness anywhere is not of anybody's own finding, but all of Christ's giving. And He will give whatever is wanted, if only the petitioner will go to Him with open, empty hands."

"And the reason why we get so little," said Ruth, "is because we hold up hands half full of dust and ashes that we fancy to be precious."

The clock in the hall struck. It was twelve o'clock. Twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve! The bells of St. Cross began a-chiming. I laid my hand softly on my sister's. Twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve. Such a many Christmases behind us! And what before us? Well, I think we shall keep Christ's birthday in heaven!

"It is time we were in bed," said Ruth, "or we shall all be late in the morning."

And so we rose, and while she extinguished the fire, I walked to the window and looked out.

"What sort of night is it?" she asked, joining me.

I moved a little aside, and let the scene answer for itself. The snow had ceased, but not before it had spread its soft purity over everything, as if angels had been dressing the earth to cradle its infant Saviour.

Ruth spoke so softly. Those clear, stern voices are the very softest sometimes. I did not hear all she murmured, but I caught the last words,—

"Wash us, and we shall be White as Snow."

I.

MILLY HAYDEN.

I, RUTH GARRETT, once kept an unmistakable shop. I not only lent books, but sold them, and periodicals besides, as well as paper, pens, and ink, and all the implements that civilization requires to record its ideas—or its want of them. And I'm very glad that I kept a shop, for it let me know something more of human nature than I should if I had lived in a parlour, doing crochet, nagging at my servant girl, and paying genteel visits to genteel people who stand towards me in a position of genteel indifference. It was far more amusing to sit at my desk, and receive all comers, from the Russian princess who stayed a month at the Manor House, to the slip-shod dressmaker who adored Bulwer Lytton, and bought his photograph only the week before her landlady sold her up for arrears of rent. I was really rather sorry to go out of business just after photographs came in. It was such fun to hear the criticisms upon them! To be sure, it is much the same thing as hearing the criticisms on books. The only conclusions to be drawn from either are, that however ugly you may be, somebody will always think you handsome, and whatever nonsense you may write, somebody will be always ready to read it.

Not that I am innocent enough to suppose that people

always read the books they borrow. But I soon found out the shams. They were divided into two classes—the first being bustling, unmethodical people, or indolent people, who fancy themselves busy. These always honestly mean to read—some day, when they have leisure: in the meantime, they don't much mind what book they take out, just to keep up their subscription. The others are sheer hypocrites and are vastly particular, their pretended taste standing as straight and stiff as would an artificial flower, if you stuck it in your garden. Natural inclinations are never straight and stiff. The man who honestly prefers history is sure sometimes to turn aside to travels or fiction, out of sheer love for his own particular study. But if one only apes a taste, he or she must be a very clever body to be able to act out its natural development. There was Miss Vix, who avoided what she called "secular reading"—I always wondered if she thought I told the curates what books she had. Not that there was anything personal in her interest in the curates, for we had about ten of them in twenty years, and she impartially looked after them all. Miss Vix had very strong clerical leanings, and at one time she felt pretty safe to read any book written by a "Reverend," but since the advent of Charles Kingsley, she found that standard had lost its safety. I wonder why Miss Vix thought God made week-days at all. I asked her once if she ventured to read the Book of Job, since some Biblical critics think it may be what is called "a story." For my own part I always had an inclination to fiction, because I think what are generally called facts are the most fictitious things in the world. How much do most biographers really know of their subject? Who would

you trust to write your biography? And yet you're nobody in particular. But if you had a giant heart, and had lived a life to match, how would you like all your grand moral anatomy to be overhauled by any pigmy that wanted to earn a dishonest penny? Now in fiction, if the writer can do nothing else, he can scarcely help letting out a bit of himself—even if it be only that he is a fool.

Now my brother Edward always had a great liking for biography. When he was quite a little boy he used to read the lives of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry over and over again. Of course I had read them, I may say before he was born, and I liked them very well, only I was sorry Howard did not pay more attention to his own son, and also that he begrudged the comforts of the little Blue-coat boys, who seem to me to deserve consideration as much as prisoners in dungeons, though they do say many get into the school whose parents could very well bring them up elsewhere, which is a shameful thing, but it only seems to me that those boys need the more pity for belonging to such sneaks. But, for my own part, I'll always believe there is more good done in the world by some people whose names never get into print, except perhaps on their tombstones, than by any professed philanthropist that was ever born. For one thing, little charities and kindnesses always breed, and great ones but seldom. If I wanted to start an almshouse or an hospital, I would not set out by announcing some great swelling subscription that would frighten away the shillings and pence, or give them a decent excuse for thinking they were not needed. You will always find that institutions, supported by a great number of small sub-

scribers, are more flourishing and wealthy than those which depend on the wealthy few. There is more in the giving than in the gift. And it is just the same with kindnesses. A man of wealth and leisure may spend his whole life in doing good, and he will be called fine names, and phrenologists will use his portrait to illustrate the organ of benevolence, and some penny-a-liner will find out all about him, where he was born, and the way he went a-wooing, and what time he rose in the morning, and it will be put into red and blue books for school-prizes, to awake the emulation of the little boys and girls, who will wish they too had wealth and leisure, when they might—possibly—go and do likewise. But let us hear that our charwoman spent the night, between one day at the wash-tub and another at the scrubbing-brush, watching by some sick neighbour of whom she knew no more than that she moved in last week and was a stranger, and her husband did not seem good to her, and then a little sting tells us where our heart is—if we have one!

But, although I own I like fiction, that is to say, fiction that treats of such people and events as may be in one's next neighbour's house at the very moment, I have no hankering after what is sometimes sighed over, as "beautiful poetical justice." As if any man's fancies can be better than God's facts. Why, they are but bad imitations of the same, only they show out harsh and coarse, like a child's clumsy transcription of his master's copy. God does not put the beginning and the end close together, as they are in story-books or in companion pictures. He takes His own time over His work, and we must do the same; and, in the meanwhile, we have His word to keep our minds easy. And, if that isn't enough

for us, we can just be uneasy, which want of faith is a sin that does not draw its punishment behind it, but carries it in a side pocket. As I know by experience. For I have mistrusted God very much more than I should like to be mistrusted myself.

Not that I am one of those who have seen so little of the world that they dare to say that goodness and badness each ripen their own fruit so far in this life, that they need no other climate to bring it to perfection. If there were no other world, then it would not be profitable to be good. It is just because there is another world that goodness rewards itself even here. "Profitable, both for this life and that which is to come." You can't separate those two clauses. We see a sinner in the midst of the best pleasures he knows anything about, and we see a saint old, alone, and poor. We look at their faces and we hear their words, and we feel that the latter is happiest, and we own that godliness is great gain. But then, that is simply because the one is snatching at delight with about as much enjoyment as a burglar might toss off a goblet of wine, as he felt an arresting hand laid on his shoulder ; whilst the other is as cheerful as a child expecting a feast, which he knows is only a little late because it is to be spread in the best room of his father's house. Better a hut with a sky view than a subterranean palace. When we count up lives, we shall always find that item, "the look forward," will make all things equal.

I cannot think how anybody cares for fiction who believes it is better than reality, which seems to me the same as saying that fallen man has a higher ideal than our pure and holy God. For my own part, I feel certain that

every fine character ever invented is just the echo of some man or woman living somewhere. And not so very far away from ourselves, may be. Only, if we are commonplace, we see them commonplace too. How many people would notice any beauty in one of Raphael's pictures, if it hung in a marine-store, priced half a crown? But, when it is put in a gallery, with walls toned to suit it, and two policemen to guard it, and its history written out in the catalogue with the prices that kings have offered for it, then, "How glorious! how divine! how unapproachable! how different to the pictures of these modern artists, common men, whom we meet at dinner-parties and *soirées!*"

Living in the same place all my life, among ordinary people, inclined to be unlearned and poor, I have caught glimpses of humanity that make me say that all the tragedies and romances and ballads ever written are just articulate voices, rising here and there among a great, solemn, dumb multitude.

To illustrate what I mean, I shall tell the history of a certain old neighbour of mine. But are you sensible enough to take any interest in a hero five feet high, with sandy hair and a squint, who got his living—rather more honestly than most fictitious heroes—in a small draper's shop?

His name was James Watson. Little Jem he was called when I first took any notice of him, which was when he was twelve years old, and I made him free of my library. I meant it for a kindness, seeing he was studious and did not care much for out-door sports. But I'm never sure whether that will be set down to the list of my good or my evil deeds. It is very hard to hit the

right way to do good, as I've always felt by personal experience, since I thought to save the time and morals of the Mallowe youth by refusing to sell trumpery, weekly journals, and nonsensical novels, and the very next week they all appeared in the Berlin shop-window, with an announcement that a discount of two-pence to the shilling would be allowed to their purchasers! And so I wonder whether it would have been better for Jem's comfort if he had never got beyond the dozen or score of books which stood at the top of his father's oaken bureau, which had fallen from more aristocratic uses to be the receptacle of the carpenter's rent-book and measurements. But I satisfy myself by reflecting that comfort is not everything, and it's better to be a wise man praying on a wooden chair, than an idiot asleep on swan's-down.

As I said, Jem's father was a carpenter. His house stood a little back from the High Street—a four-roomed cottage, with a long strip of garden, especially rich in hollyhocks, balsams, and sunflowers. There was a honeysuckle trained round the parlour window, and its delicate flowers come sweeping over the coarse white curtains. That parlour was altogether a pretty place, for Jem's father had a taste in his simple way, and it never misled him but once. Which was when he chose his wife for her good looks.

"You don't know how I like your parlour, Mr. Watson," I said to him one day, shouting into his ear, for a long habit of withdrawing his attention from his wife's tongue, alternately sharp and querulous, had ultimately produced the effect of deafness. "I don't think anybody need to want a pleasanter room."

"Eh? ye never knows, miss," he answered. He never

got beyond that. His life's mistake had not drawn a sharp line across his character, as it sometimes does, but it had smeared it all over, so that he was never sure of anything in himself or anybody else, and had no firm anchorage in life except his work with rule and measure in the shed beyond the garden. And there little Jem used to sit all day among the shavings, with the green light through the trees making his white face quite ghastly. His father seldom spoke to him. He had lost the habit of speaking before Jem was born, and could not get it back. But early experience had made Jem associate speech with scolding, and so silence seemed the oracle of love. Jem knew his father loved him, though the love was not uttered in the ordinary paternal pettings and spoilings and treatings, and showed itself chiefly in a stubborn resentment at any hint that Jem was "growing up." For the silent carpenter had lost faith in life, and wanted to snatch a sort of enchanted pleasure in spite of it. I think he would have been very glad if Time could have crystallized round that wooden shed under the trees, with him at work on some endless "job," and little Jem sitting on the shavings. Disappointments lift some minds above themselves, and set them on hill-tops, where they can see the sun long after the valley is dark. But others they fetter, as in a prison-cell, with just one little flower growing between the stones to bear witness to their hearts that God is still alive. Not that Mr. Watson the carpenter knew that he was disappointed. He only knew there was something wrong. The doctor said it was indigestion, and the carpenter assented, but with the grim words, "That was a rum thing for a workingman to have!"

Jem was always a great favourite of mine, and his father interested me like an unguessed riddle, or a poem where one is not quite sure what the poet means—very likely because he did not know himself. So, for their sakes, I made the best of Mrs. Watson. And she was not a bad woman to visit, for she always made me thank God I did not belong to her. Grumble, grumble, grumble! She was under the delusion that she did herself a mortal injustice the day she "accepted" Watson, "for she was not like girls who only have one chance—bless you, what with her good looks—she might speak of them herself now, mightn't she? for they were all gone" (at which juncture one was expected to shake one's head and protest). "Well, with whatever it might be that they called her good looks, and her nice little bit of money, she might have looked higher, that she might! Watson wasn't the first. No, indeed. And she refused him twice, but he wouldn't take 'No,' for an answer. Let it be understood that in those days he was a fine-looking young fellow, and with a coaxing tongue. If she'd known how sulky and plain he'd turn out, she wouldn't have looked at him, not if he'd been the squire himself. But we can't all be prophets—more's the pity!"—and then Mrs. Watson would finish with a pathetic sigh, which was understood to allude to an old swain, whom she had despised for plainness and poverty, but who had since gone up in prosperity until he drove out in "as neat a trap as you'd wish to see." Whether or no he kept an annual thanksgiving on the day when she refused him, I never ascertained, but I should think it to be very likely.

No man in Mallowe worked harder than Mr. Watson. Yet the family grew poorer and poorer. There was

always sickness in the house. The wife said it pleased the Lord to afflict them, and the others mustn't murmur under their share, since the heavier burden of personal suffering generally lay on her. "If you saw how Watson looks at the doctor's bills, you'd know in a minute that he'd no feeling. What's money compared to his wife's life?" she would say.

Did she think it was pleasing to God that she should wear thin shoes in wet weather, because she wanted to keep household expenses at a tolerable level after an extra outlay on a smart bonnet? Then she was a woman who did not like cooking, having once had a complexion, which she had feared to spoil, and so the family dinners were just prepared in the easiest fashion. "Wasn't what was good enough for other people good enough for them?" she argued; "she hated folks who despised good victuals unless there had been a whole morning wasted in cooking them." I saw this meal once, and wondered no more at the stories of Mr. Watson's indigestion and Jemmy's want of appetite. And I was willing enough to admit that God had certainly afflicted Mrs. Watson, since he gave her a poor head to begin with, and never changed her heart.

Jemmy seldom went among the village boys except at school hours. He had got into the habit of reading aloud to his father in the shed, of course in an interjectional way, ceasing when the hammer was needed, and proceeding when the quieter work was going forward. Jemmy told me all about it with great glee. I scarcely supposed his father listened, or cared for it at all, except as a possible means of pleasing his boy and keeping him at his side. But I thought it might do Jemmy no harm.

For good habits, or bad ones either, are very often not purposely planted in our lives by our legitimate gardeners, but are just dropped in by accidental circumstances. And to accommodate oneself to the state of things around one, is a lesson worth learning. There's a good deal in having patience and temper to keep quiet in the right place in our lives while God's hammer checks us. I will own that I have always found that bit of discipline particularly hard.

The carpenter died suddenly when James was just fourteen. He had worked all day as usual, and had read the newspaper at supper-time. He died in the night. His wife told the story of his last groans and departure, making the strong point to be "the terrible turn" it gave her when he aroused her. James had his version too. "While mother went to fetch the brandy, poor father said he would not have woke her and frightened her, but at the minute his head was so bad that he did not remember things. He seemed to have fancied it was long ago. Mother says he called her 'Nellie,' which he'd never used for years and years. He was dead before she came back. I was not frightened to be alone with him. What should make me frightened of father?"

Then came the question of Jem's starting in life. The boy himself had formed no plan on the subject, and his mother settled it for him. He should not be a carpenter. That was just "a common working man." She hated the cap and apron. I could not help thinking of the people at Nazareth eighteen hundred years ago. But what can you expect of such an ignorant woman as Mrs. Watson, while great preachers and great painters, and people who think themselves great Christians, all seem

to forget that there was any work to be done in that Jewish household, and to fancy that the Virgin mother had nothing better to do, than to sit with her hands folded, making a mincing face! O, if I could paint, wouldn't I make a picture of Joseph and Jesus hard at work—hard at work, mind, like people who have to earn their next meal, and don't grudge to have something over to give away. And Mary should be in the background cooking, not picture or novel-cooking, remember, where the heroine doesn't redden her face, or soil her hands, but really cooking, and a little flushed and flustered, yet still in good temper. I sometimes think it is almost a pity to keep to the Eastern landscapes and dresses. Christ belongs to England as much as to Jerusalem, and we don't read the Bible in Hebrew. But it isn't every one that could translate it for himself, and it is not every body that can translate facts. It is not everybody who can realize that people in turbans and robes are just the same as people in hats and bonnets. It might bring the Bible more home to some of us, if we had pictures with the apostles in blouses and jackets, and the Pharisees in dress-coats, and Mary Magdalen in trailing flounces, with a carotty-chignon. Does anybody say that the very idea is irreverent? Let them take care that there is not more irreverence in their fancied veneration. Perhaps the same people will be disappointed when they get to heaven, if they do not find everything there like the pictures of it in their old family Bible.

Well, in order that Jem might satisfy his mother's heart, by wearing broadcloth and beaver like her rejected suitor's sons, it was arranged that he should be apprenticed to the linendraper. Does not this all verify what I

say about the effect of appearances on modern people? I wonder who you think I mean by "common people." Very likely I mean you, unless you are that one in a hundred—or in a thousand—who dares to have a mind of your own, and to use it, without waiting until a bishop or a prince has made it up for you.

Jem took his mother's decision very quietly. Once I saw him leaning over their garden paling and looking into the deserted shed. When he turned and his eyes met mine, I knew there was a bit of poetry in his mind. Now, never sigh over "mute, inglorious Miltons," in whom

> "Chill Penury repressed the noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul."

I don't believe in them. When God means a genius to speak, you may be sure that it speaks, under any circumstances. Hasn't genius spoken from all sorts of places —prisons, ploughed fields, factories, and shops? If there's anywhere that it speaks seldomest, I think it is in king's palaces, and rich men's houses. But I do believe that God makes many geniuses that He never means to speak, except to Himself—like the wild flowers in the secret places of the mountains, blooming for His eyes only. We needn't sit down and make our silly moan over what we call the waste. Doesn't God see depths of ugliness below what we see, and has He not a right to keep some beauty all to Himself? Those mountain-flowers, living out their whole short life, and then peacefully fading down among the grass, need they envy the valley blossoms, torn up, and carried in hot hands, and botanised over, and put in vases, and forgotten, till somebody finds them out by the smell of decay,

and tells the rude truth of them, and tumbles them into the gutter, to be carried off by the dust-cart? And yet on their part these valley-flowers may have pleased a child, or cheered an invalid. Let all be content. Those whom God uses in the world's work may be broken in the task, but He can mend them. Those whom He keeps to Himself, who shall say they are of no use? Doesn't a rich robe look the better if the unseen lining is good? He is but a poor merchant who has no stores but in his window. It is not a very fine character that does not hide a grain or two of its purest gold. The world was not made for you nor for me, nor yet for to-day. It was made for God and for Eternity. And depend on it, it will fit its ends. But hasn't Satan interfered, do you ask? Well, God knew that he would. Do you suppose that he took God by surprise? I am not going to try to explain how it is: I am not such a fool as to think that I am wise enough for that. Only I am not at all afraid that Satan will get his own way in the least. Perhaps he fancies so, yet. But I scarcely think so. I believe he knows bitterly well that his work will all end in his own disappointment. Because I say this, you need not suppose that I have never felt as if all the good in the world was going to the dogs. But that did not alter the fact, and was only because I was in some danger of going to the dogs myself, which would have left the world but little the poorer. I will give you a prescription in case you should ever feel so yourself. Read the thirty-seventh psalm. Then get to some active housework. If there is reasonable excuse, have up the carpets, and stir about all the furniture. If not, turn out the linen closet, or re-arrange the bookcase. If you

have the misfortune to be a man, go for a long walk. Don't take your pipe with you. Do five miles an hour. By the time you return, I daresay you may read the twenty-third psalm and go to bed. If you don't think the world more hopeful next morning, I don't know what is to be done with you, except that the sooner you are transplanted somewhere else, the better for everybody concerned, if not for yourself! You may say I bring sublime things to a very practical conclusion. But if people are not practical, what are they?

I did not think Jem quite liked his new position at the draper's. He never said anything against it, except once "that it seemed work that women might do." I flatly told him I'd rather have him to serve me than any woman in existence. I don't want to be hard upon my own sex, poor things. But human nature will be human nature, drill it how you may. And when a girl sees her sweetheart waiting for her at the other side of the street, how can she have patience with an old maid who keeps her in behind the counter, while she chooses the exact shade of green which she flatters herself suits her best? Of course the young men have sweethearts too, but then the sweethearts belong to the same sex as the old maid, which makes them a little merciful towards her. Besides, they know that their sweethearts will wait patiently enough, while the poor girls find theirs as cross as two sticks if they're kept waiting,—that is to say, if they are good enough to wait at all? So, you see, I own that it is not the girls' fault, and I am not blaming them a bit; and they will be the most charming creatures in creation when the men will permit them,—only in the meantime I prefer a man to serve me!

When Jem was seventeen, he insisted on paying his subscription to my library. I told him I thought he might take my kindness a little longer for the sake of old acquaintanceship, when he had the impertinence to say that if he did, he would not be worthy of it. In those days, Jem used to come in sometimes of an evening, and sit with me for an hour or two. I daresay it was just a little livelier than at home with his mother, especially since about that time she heard a sermon that chanced to make her cry, which she set down as the date of her conversion, and straightway illustrated the graces of hope and charity by announcing that Mr. Watson had died in darkness, and that Jem was living in the same gloomy state. For she was one of those who do not know Religion unless it be ticketed, and in its case, as in all others, the genuine article has the least puffing. But her blunders did not do much harm—perhaps rather good. They shook Jem's faith in himself, but not in his Saviour. And so he stayed safely in the shadiest corners of the Valley of Humiliation. And she never made him fret about his father. Jem knew more than she did.

Three or four years later, when James was twenty-one, we had a pic-nic early in the summer. It was given by old Mr. Weston, of the Meadow farm, to celebrate the birthday of his eldest son's son, which young man's present age fixes the date as not much less than thirty years ago. It is a very good thing I am not ashamed of being an old woman, else I should have to hold my tongue. For I can scarcely tell any story, without disclosing that I was middle-aged when middle-aged people were born. I am so amused to see the consternation of

some of my contemporaries when they get confused into compromising themselves with ancient dates. I let them deceive themselves into the belief that they deceive other people, and then I take my revenge by wagging over their heads my superiority as their senior!

Well, we had our pic-nic, and we went to Hopleigh Wood. For a wonder, it was not a wet day. Of course there were twice as many women as men. There always are. And if there isn't, it doesn't matter; for however much gallantry is in the market, it is sure to be absorbed by two or three girls; and in nine cases out of ten, one of those will be a girl who has done caring for any gallantry at all, and is impartially lively and good-natured all round, and the other is going to be married to somebody who is not there, and the third is secretly engaged to somebody who is, and that is the young man, who to keep up appearances, holds himself aloof, and pays dutiful but abstracted attention to some knowing old maid, —like me, who guesses all about it, but has too much sense to say anything!

The belle of that pic-nic was little Milly Hayden. She was an orphan, and the apprentice of our Mallowe milliner. At that time I suppose she was about seventeen, —a mite of a thing, with a dear little head, turning about like a bird's. Milly was altogether like a bird; even the frills and fripperies of her dress seemed to have a natural coquetry in them, like a canary's feathers. The women in general were not very fond of Milly, though they were friendly enough towards her, asking her to take tea with them, when they wanted to get a touch-up for their home-made bonnets, and keeping very close to her on such occasions as this pic-nic, and so deluding themselves

into the belief that they each had their share in attracting the beaux that came about her. Aside, and especially in conversation with their brothers and cousins and men-friends of all degrees, they said she was a nice girl, but giddy, and that was such a pity, for she would make a charming woman if she only had a little prudence and industry for household management. Except old Mrs. Boulder of Northend farm, who was left a widow at thirty, in debt, with six boys to bring up, and who, at sixty, was the chief businesss woman in Mallowe, with a farm like a picture, from corn-field to dairy, and every one of her sons well-doing before God and man. Mrs. Boulder carried an oaken staff, and had a habit of leaning on it with both hands, just as she did while she was judging the points of cows and horses, and criticizing her own hay and clover. Said Mrs. Boulder, "Milly Hayden is the right stuff to make a woman. Look at her eyes. Look at her mouth. Look at the way she moves. I wish I had a seventh son to marry Milly Hayden!"

Of course everybody supposed that Milly was quite free. I never thought about it until that pic-nic, when, somehow, I began to fancy that my favorite Jamie was losing his heart to her. I took a little notice then. She was full of fun and playfulness, but there was a tenderness in her mirth, and a sort of pathetic gravity came over her whenever she was silent, which made me doubt whether she was not beginning to have more definite thoughts of the future than those mere girlish visions of "whoever may be my husband—if I marry."

James walked home with her from Hopleigh Wood to the milliner's door. He offered her his arm, but I heard her excuse herself, on the ground that she had to gather

up her dress and to carry some wild flowers. She would not let him carry those wild flowers. And she began chatting with some other girl, and fixed her to walk with them. I chanced to pass the three, under the trees, and I thought Milly's face looked old and grave and scared. But James was in high delight.

And he kept in high delight for days after. And he took to reading the minor poets,—he, who had loved Bacon, and Milton, and the Arabian Nights! I knew what it meant, and somehow, remembering Milly's face under the trees that night, I was sorry for James.

There are broad, sunny fields rising from Mallowe to Upper Mallowe, and between their hedge-rows winds a narrow lane. It is commonly known as "Deadman's Passage," and it is certainly rather gloomy just where it cuts through the Minor Park, and is flanked by pitchy black palings instead of green hedge. But I persist in calling it Love Lane, which is a brighter name and a truer one. What is the use of connecting a place with the solitary man who cut his throat in it eighty years ago, rather than with the scores of couples who have walked there talking nonsense to each other every summer since Mallowe existed? This is the way we used to go and return from our Christmas parties when I was a young girl. It would not have taken us five minutes longer if we had kept to the high road. But there were generally eight or a dozen of us who lived in the same direction and took care of each other on our way home, and we preferred anything that set our midnight walk a little in the light of an adventure. I daresay some of us were fools enough to wish Love Lane twice as long as it is. The snow used to drift there inches deep, and it was

fit to give us our deaths of cold, but I never heard that anybody was the worse! I have always gone up it now and again for the sake of old associations. For though it is painful to walk alone where one went last night with a dear friend, yet ten years after it is sweet to go there and think it all over. It might tear open an emigrant's heart if he could have a telescope so strong as to show him the very home of his childhood, with his mother sitting at the door, and the wicker cage hanging over her head. But it soothes him to catch a distant glimpse of the sea that washes the shores of his fatherland. And so I still go through Love Lane sometimes, and if I'm smiling when I meet the sheepish couples, I hope they don't think I am laughing at them. I am an old maid, but my life is not altogether like an empty house, where there's nothing to do but to put one's head out of the window and watch the neighbors!

About three weeks after our pic-nic, I happened to take this sentimental stroll. It had been a sultry, close day, and the sun was setting in heavy, rolling, storm-clouds. I like stormy sunsets. I don't know why, unless it be that they put me in mind of the lives and loves that seem to go down in darkness, and give me hope that, after all, they may have a bright dawn another day. Well, I walked on and on up Love Lane, and didn't meet a creature. I supposed all the sweethearts had been kept indoors by the great heat drops that had fallen once or twice. But at last, at a turn of the lane, I heard voices coming nearer, a man's voice, deep, but drawling and indifferent, and a girl's, very sweet, in that sort of arpeggio note that seems to run from a smile to a tear. I knew who she was before I saw her.

It was Milly Hayden. And she was leaning on the arm of Frederick Miles, the miller's son. He had been at the pic-nic with his mother and the rest of his family, and had not taken any notice of Milly. He had been within hearing of Mrs. Boulder's comments, and I remembered that he gave a peculiar smile and turned away. The two were not walking as if this were their first ramble, nor their second, nor their third, nor anything within counting. The goal of the girl's heart had been won before my friend James started in the race.

They had to unlock their arms to let me pass. I gave a nod and a smile to Milly, and a very black look to Mr. Miles, behind her back. What on earth could she see in him! For what was he, but a moustache and a gold watch and a suit of broad-cloth?—unless indeed, she was worldly-minded, and thought something of his £5,000, and his acres behind the mill, and the crest on his signet-ring, for the Mileses were "well-descended," though I never heard that any of their ancestors did anything as creditable as Milly Hayden's dead father, who was a sergeant in the army, and was killed in India, going straight under fire to pick up a drummer-boy, whose foot was shot off. But I did not think Milly was worldly-minded. As for him, I could guess he was only taken with her pretty face and playful ways, much as a savage might seize a Bible for the sake of its gilt leaves.

I walked up the lane, pondering. Perhaps Jemmy too had only been drawn to her by her "taking" face. His father's weakness might have descended to the son. Now I'm not saying a word against the love of beauty. Its perfection is just the love of God, and of lower things according to their likeness to God. But God is a Spirit,

and our spirits are yet in the flesh. And it often happens that the sharp instruments with which God shapes the rough materials of our souls, cuts and wounds and wears away that flesh. You can't do hard work and keep white hands. But we shall not have the same hand in heaven, and we shall have the same spirit. So brave Duty plants the seed of eternal beauty. But most people's love of beauty is like a childish preference for a dandelion instead of a hard green rosebud. I think the angels smile at our æsthetics,—or perhaps they weep.

So I walked on where Love Lane grows very steep and narrow. It is shady all through, but there the trees are thick and meet overhead, and it is very gloomy. Then there is a style, and just beyond the style, a sharp turn, and you find yourself suddenly out of the dark lane, in a broad open field. At that time it was set with peas, and was so bright with scarlet popies that the whole field was like the great fat nosegays made up by innocent ungenteel country people. It burst upon you like a flourish of trumpets after a sad old ballad. It was like David's six joyful songs at the end of the psalms. I stood still and looked,—and for a moment I forgot all about James and Milly and Mr. Miles.

But when I turned to proceed, they were brought back to mind directly, for there was James coming in the opposite direction. He must have been in the field a few minutes, for he had quite a bunch of poppies, and was tying them up in some ferns. James was a great lover of wild flowers. Many a time had I listened to his mother's complaints "how he littered the parlor with weeds and bracken, sticking them up in her best Bohemian vases, just as if they hadn't a garden of their own,

and good flowers that had cost money, without bringing home rubbish that a tinker would scorn to touch." One day James overheard these comments, and he gave a queer little laughing nod, and a roguish glance from me to a book which he had from my shop more than once. I knew what he meant. "Let the tinker scorn them—Wordsworth wouldn't."

And here, let me say aside, isn't it ridiculous to hear vulgar people depreciate things by the manner in which the lowest depreciate them, as if their taste and wisdom were the final standard of everything? For instance, I've often heard it said "A beggar would not make such a fuss about a penny." Of course not! If he did, he would soon cease to be a beggar! If I wanted to learn the value of money, I should not go to street-sweepers, or navvies, I should go to great millionaires. And so with everything.

Jem came forward smiling. "I'm gathering weeds, as usual," said he; "and I'm uncommonly fond of these weeds. People seem to forget that God made them, and call them 'flaunting,' and all manner of ugly names. And yet some ladies that wouldn't pick a real poppy in a meadow will wear the artificial ones in their bonnets, and think them fine enough then. I can't think what fault folks find with these. If it's because they wither soon, so does the rose. Not that I'm comparing the two. But all flowers can't be roses. And I'm not sure that we'd think so much of the rose if there wasn't anything else. And anyhow, the poppy likes good company—corn and peas, and all sorts of useful things. This is a glory of a field, Miss Garrett. It's like coming to a place in your life where you meet a happiness you never knew before,

and it strikes you at once, 'How ever did I live without it?'"

Poor James! The sun was very far down, and it was not to screen its light that I shaded my eyes. He was in paradise,—should I leave him there, though it was only a fool's paradise? No, the longer the dream, the worse the wakening. And somehow, though I was not in James's special confidence, I felt I should be false if I brought out what I had seen as a mere incidental remark; so I said, quietly—

"I have just passed Milly Hayden and Mr. Miles in Love Lane."

"Together?" asked James, with a sudden stony look on his face.

"Yes, together," I answered. "If it is to be anything serious, I could have wished her a better choice."

James did not laugh it off as likely to be a bit of silly flirtation. No true lover could sincerely do so, whatever he might feign. James put down his gay nosegay on the top of the hedge, and folded his arms. He stood in silence a few minutes. Then I asked if he were coming my way.

"I think I'll rest here awhile," he said; "so good evening, Miss Garrett."

I had some business which kept me in Upper Mallowe till rather late. But as there was a bright moon, I took Love Lane for my homeward way. The field was empty —the tall poppies swaying in the breeze like dancing fairies. But in the moonlight I saw the little bunch left on the hedge. James had forgotten it.

I was sorry for him. But I suppose everybody must spend two or three sleepless nights in their day, or else

life would be incomplete. I know I had my turn before then ; and I'm not sure but I'd willingly lie awake to-night if I might care for anything as I did in those days. But there is no comfort in being sleepless now, for it is only because the supper has been too heavy, or something of that sort. Even at the time of James Watson's troubles, I could wake up and ponder over other people's sorrows. I never even do that now. I put a word for them in my prayers, and then sleep soundly. Yet I do not think I am grown hard-hearted. It is rather because experience has made me certain that they will soon get out of their afflictions somehow. And what is the good of slowly killing oneself in the meantime ?

Before many days after, Edward Miles and Milly Hayden openly walked up High Street together, and by such announcement of their engagement gave a new topic to the Mallowe gossips, which seemed very likely to last them until Milly should deepen the interest of the situation by ordering her wedding gown.

Then it was that I first wondered if I had done well to encourage James's studious inclinations. More than once in my evening walks I saw him daundering about in the quietest corners, with no better company than his own foolish miseries. I do not deny that a ploughman, guiltless even of the alphabet, may be " crossed in love," but he scarcely knows what it means, and I believe that most diseases are made worse by knowing the fine names for them, and who died of them, and how the doctors treat them in directly opposite ways. Perfect knowledge may help nature, but sheer ignorance is better than half-and-half knowledge. And how is a young man or a girl, in the greenness of their first disappointment, to know that

all the bewailing lyrical poets were not at all as wretched as they sing that they were, but kept good banking accounts—when they could,—and were often extraordinarily particular about their dinners and their dress?

Poor James!

That autumn I was in the draper's shop buying some Welsh flannel, when Milly and Mrs. Miles came in. The miller's portly wife evidently did not feel unkindly towards her intended daughter, though she was quite incapable of Mrs. Boulder's stern appreciation. They wanted to buy some white satin ribbon and tulle. James served them. And he hunted out some little speciality that Milly asked for, though I heard his master himself say that he did not think it was in the shop. I don't mean to moralize. If you cannot see anything in the scene, never mind. It is worth while to describe a picture to a blind man, but I do not think one need to explain it to an idiot. Let him put his finger in his mouth and gape,—but I hope I am not saying anything personal!

As Milly was leaving she caught sight of me, and turned back to leave a bright smile and word behind, and then tripped on after her future mother-in-law.

That was the last time we ever saw pretty rose-bud Milly Hayden.

Only the evening after, an awful whisper went down the village street, and frightened eyes were lifted to the white-curtained window above the milliner's shop. Milly had sickened that morning, and the doctor had been, and now a strange nurse had arrived, and, under their breath, people spoke of "malignant small-pox."

It was true. And so there was a grand exodus from

Mallowe. The Manor people went to the sea a fortnight earlier than their wont, and Miss Vix had a sudden fit of niecely dutifulness to an old aunt at a distance, and the whole family of Mileses left Mill Corner.

"Edward couldn't do any good if he stayed," said Mrs. Miles to me, when she called at my shop the day before they started, to procure the last new novels to beguile their journey. "And, besides, one doesn't know how it may end, so the sooner his mind is diverted the better. Milly was a sweet, pretty creature" (she used the dreadful past tense already). "I tell my girls it is an awful instance of the uncertainty of all earthly things."

That same afternoon Mrs. Boulder looked in upon me, with a great basket in her hand, while the strange stamp of determined purpose gave her stern features a sort of solemn enthusiasm.

"I'm going to Milly, Miss Garrett," she said. "They're making a fine to-do at home about it; but I told them I'd brought them all up and done my fair duty to them, and if I find I've a bit of heart and strength over, I've a right to use it how I like. Milly's father lost his life caring for somebody else's child, so shouldn't somebody run a little risk for his? Good-bye, Miss Garrett. I don't suppose any harm will come to me, but one never knows. Good-bye."

The ghastly distemper did its worst, but Milly did not die. Though once the sick-nurse said grimly, "She'll maybe wish she had."

Mrs. Boulder went safely through her self-imposed duties, and as soon as possible she carried the invalid away for change of air. Nobody saw them before they

went. And while they were away all the fugitives came back, and Mallowe settled down again.

Once, after the family had returned, Edward Miles was missing for two days, and it was whispered that he had taken a trip to see Milly. And people looked at each other, and shook their heads, and Miss Vix said that "beauty was only skin-deep," and she had "heard that love had wings."

It was a chilly autumn afternoon when a fly drove up to my door, and Mrs. Boulder and Milly got out. They sent on their luggage, and came in to pay me a visit.

Yes, we had certainly seen pretty rosebud Milly for the very last time. Now, I saw a small thin woman with fur about her throat and blue spectacles over her eyes. There was no trace of the saucy little nose, or the dimpled chin, or the laughing mouth. All the purply horror of the disease was gone, but it had left a white, sharp, scarred face. It was difficult to feel that she was not a perfect stranger.

"Milly is her father's own daughter," said Mrs. Boulder that evening, as we three sat about the fire, "for she caught the pestilence through guiding a tramper woman into the right road to Hopleigh, where we hear the poor creature died in the work house three days after."

"You shouldn't speak of it, Mrs. Boulder," said the subdued, altered voice, "for it was nothing, and besides, I don't think I could have done it,—if I'd known!"

"You did it, and that's enough," said the old lady, and then passed on to other conversation, in which Milly sustained a cheerful though modest part. I noticed her right hand fingering the thin finger of her left one.

I fancied I remembered she had worn an engaged ring. But her hands were bare now.

"Yes, indeed," nodded Mrs. Boulder, while the girl went away to amuse herself with a new packet of books I had just received from London. "Yes, he has given her up. She offered him the free chance, and he took it! I've never wished I was a man before, but I wish I was one now, and wouldn't I give him a good taste of pump-water! A week in the country gaol would be a cheap purchase of the pleasure it would give me! Or I don't know whether a cart-tail and a horsewhip wouldn't do better than the pump. Don't say I'm coarse. I don't care. If one of my sons had played Edward Miles' false game, he should never have darkened my doors again. No!"

How was it that a few days after I found James in high spirits?—and what made him say to me, "Perhaps she never cared much for him, Miss Garrett?"

Milly went back to her work, and appeared at church and in the Sunday-school as usual. At first, there was a feeling of sympathy for her and indignation against Mr. Miles. But these sensations always die out presently, and then Milly was left to slip into the background of general village society. She took it calmly and quietly, and was as cheerful as ever, though in a different key. It was hard to guess how much she suffered. Wise old Mrs. Boulder shook her head, and said Milly was not the girl to cry after any man, except in her heart. But everybody cannot be wise, and nobody is wise always. So James Watson waited upon Milly at tea-parties, and took her home from them, and spoke to her at the church door, where he always happened to be entering and leav-

ing at the same time. And at the end of twelve months, just as the leaves were again turning brown, James Watson made Milly an offer of marriage.

He told me about it himself, with the melancholy preface that "one must speak to somebody."

"She seemed quite astonished," he narrated. "She said she thought I had taken special notice of her just out of pity! Out of pity! She spoke very kindly, Miss Garrett; but she wouldn't hear of it. She said she had loved Edward Miles, and she did not feel that she did not love him still, and she knew that she did not love anybody else. She says she had made up her mind that she is to be a single woman. So I told her, Then I must be a single man!"

"You're a pair of fools, for your comfort," I told him. And that was all the sympathy he had from me. What was the use of making a palavar that would have softened his soft heart still more. He wanted tonic treatment, and I gave it to him.

Time passed on. Edward Miles came into a considerable fortune left by a bachelor uncle, and presently he married a girl with a fine face and a good income at her own disposal. Mrs. Miles sat in my library gossiping with some other old woman, and driving me nearly wild by saying, "After all, it was true that it was indeed an ill wind that blew nobody good, and the family could take up this match much more warmly than they ever could the other, though, to be sure, Miss Hayden was as nice a girl as could be, who was nothing, and belonged to nobody, and hadn't a penny of her own."

The young Miles' couple did not settle in Mallowe, but went some distance away, and however much the old

miller and his wife might approve of the marriage, they certainly saw but little of their son and his bride.

At that time I think James made Milly another offer, and was refused again. He did not tell me anything about it, but I noticed that thenceforth they stood on a different footing toward each other—an intimate, old-neighbourly, half-cousinly relationship. They were each in business for themselvs now, and James used to buy for Milly, and throw work in her way, and help her with her tax-papers, and all the other trials of unprotected females. James and his mother still lived together in the old house, whence he came and went to his shop; and Mrs. Watson was as discontented as ever, and made her son's life as burdensome as she could, though she triumphantly dwelt on the fact, that her boy kept to his old mother, that he did, and didn't think that he couldn't be happy unless he put some dressed-up chit over her head, repeating the same thing to James in a different version—that he knew what was good for himself; and depend on it, all the simpletons that were forever going and getting married rued it ever after. Not as it wasn't to be expected in fine, handsome young men, like his own father had once been, or like Edward Miles was now; but a poor creature like him, that no girl was likely to run after, was quite safe from temptation—the better for him.

James smiled and answered, "Yes, mother."

And all the while in Mallowe itself, and in every town and city in Great Britain, silly girls and sillier old-maids sat behind Venetian blinds, and strummed "The Troubadour," and lamented over man's fickleness and the end of chivalry! They have eyes for the like of Edward Miles, but they don't notice James Watson.

And so Milly grew middle-aged—and became such a beloved and respected village authority, that we forgot all about her appearance, until one day some literary lion, visiting at the Rectory, was heard to remark, "What an interesting, gracious-looking woman!" That opened all our minds to the change that Time had so gradually wrought. The dreadful scars were much worn away, and she no longer used spectacles, and though there was no "dance" in her eyes, there was a clear, steady light that was as beautiful in its way. And her mouth had fulfilled the promise which keen Mrs. Boulder had seen in its budding youth. You could not fancy it uttering anything but wisdom and kindness—just the mouth to give last kisses to the dying. Milly's hair had been very, very thin since that dreadful illness, but now she wore a soft lace cap, and the few locks that strayed in front had that peculiarly delicate beauty which fine hair often possesses in advancing life. And Milly could afford black silk dresses now, and was seldom seen in anything else But it struck me then, and I believe it still, that the consciousness of James Watson's faithful love had something to do with the strange, sweet charm which grew about Milly. There had been a rent in her life, but out of its black chasm had grown a wondrous fair flower, which had pitifully clothed its yawning horror. She seemed to wear it like a consecration. And yet I could never help feeling angry with her. Why wouldn't she try to love James? We never know what we can do till we try.

Mrs. Edward Miles died. We, the people of Mallowe, had never seen much of her, though some of us kept a very vivid recollection of the fine silks and velvets which

she had worn on the few occasions that she had come among us. Now she died and was buried. The two Misses Miles who remained unmarried, put themselves into very deep mourning, and a new name was written on the great heavy mausoleum wherein the old miller and his wife already reposed. We heard that the widower went abroad, and we heard nothing more of him until fully a year after his wife's death, when, having doffed every sign of his bereavement, he suddenly reappeared amongst us at a Christmas gathering.

There he saw Milly, "and he spoke to her," said my informant, who happened to be Miss Vix, "of course only out of civility. But Miss Hayden colored up like a girl when she saw him, as if she thought that maybe he might not think so much of good looks now. But la! he's a richer man than he was in those days, and he knows the world now, and his own value, and he's a handsome man still, though a little cross-looking, but no doubt the last Mrs. Edward tried his temper."

In these days, Mr. Edward Miles kept a neat little brougham, and only two days after that Christmas gathering, this brougham stood at Miss Hayden's door. I think it stood there fully an hour, and Miss Vix owned that she watched it the whole time,—but she did not see much for her pains. When Mr. Miles left, Milly's apprentice let him out, and he seemed to speak sharply to his coachman, but very likely he always did.

In the course of that evening, I met Milly stepping down the High Street, with an awed, earnest look on her face. She did not see me, and there was something about her that forbade me to stop her.

That night I chanced to sit up late, neither through

Christmas dissipation nor Christmas mooning, I can assure you, but just because of stock-taking. When I had finished, I went to the window and looked out I love a frosty, starlight night, and especially I love it in a long, quiet street, where one can see firelights from happy family rooms, and glimmering candlelights from innocent chambers, where mothers are putting their children to bed. I once heard a little girl ask if the stars were angels taking care of us while the sun was asleep. And, I am not sure that the child did not get nearer to the warm heart of truth, than did our Mallowe astronomer, who brought himself to the parish by neglecting his proper business while he sat at his telescope, where he seemed to learn nothing but a lot of distances that nobody could ever remember. Not that I have some old women's scorn of science. I think it is like a very clever boy, getting on fast and naturally a little positive and conceited sometimes. We can have patience with that, but it is a little hard that it expects us to swear by each of its conclusions, though it is sure to advance to another in six months' time. Before it expects us to believe that we are all in the wrong, and that Moses made mistakes, and Solomon did not know what he was writing about, cannot it wait till it has quite finished its lessons?

The house opposite to mine was dark enough. It was Milly Hayden's. I was just wondering whether she had come home, when two long shadows came sloping down the moonlit pavement. They were cast by two little people, Milly and James. They stopped at her door; and, as I didn't suppose anything particular was about to happen, I stayed at the window. Well! After what I saw at their parting—though it is not likely that I'm going to

tell you what it was—I was not at all astonished when next Sunday the bands were published between James Watson and Millicent Hayden.

Eighteen months after, I heard all about the events of that winter day. How the moment Millicent saw her old lover at the party, once more free, she felt as by a sudden revelation that her love for him was utterly dead; how his visit to her was made with a view to renewing their old hopes; how it was her turn to tell him that her heart was changed, and that it could not be; how the new wisdom brought a new knowledge with it, and she felt a wild conviction that it was due to James to tell him that she had rejected the man for whose sake she had refused him; how she never knew how she did it, nor what she said, nor anything that happened, till she felt her hand clasped in James's, and heard him saying:—

"Though God's goodness may tarry long, yet it comes at last."

How did I hear all this? Millicent Watson told me the story; Millicent Watson in a widow's cap, seated beside me near her husband's grave. He had just one year of the happiness he had longed and waited for. And then he went away to be with the angels. "How could I have died without you?" he said to Milly before he went. And she kissed him. And he was satisfied.

They had no child, and the one relic of Milly's short married life was her husband's cankered, complaining mother. But for his sake, she loved the burden almost passionately,—and her mother-in-law did not give her kindness much rest.

"Ah," old Mrs. Watson used to say, "what a blessing it is that after Jem had kept single so long, he got mar-

ried before he died, so that I am not left quite alone in my old age! It has been managed pretty comfortably for me after all, and I suppose I've no right to murmur, though it's hard to be brought to depend on a stranger, when, if I'd done as I might have done in my young days I should be a widow well left, and under no obligation to anybody!"

You see the old woman's history was all written in capital I's. I think she must have used up her son's share of that letter, for his life seemed to have none at all.

Now, if Milly had been a lady in a castle on the Rhine, and James had been a knight in rusty armor, this would have been fit stuff for a ballad; but, as circumstances stand, why do I condescend to tell such a commonplace story?

Why did Moses tell us of Jacob and Rachel? Why did somebody write of Boaz and Ruth? Because each of our lives has to write a love-story of its own, and our loving Father gave us one or two pure ideals to write it after. And, in this age, which thinks itself so reasonable because it fancies it has done with romance, I believe that anybody who catches an echo of the old sweet song, does good service. For echoes repeat themselves, and even the faint echo of a faint echo is better than dead silence.

If there were more men like James Watson, where would sensation-novelists obtain their plots? And wouldn't the judge in the Divorce Court have a pair of white gloves every session.

Let us thank God for real romance. It seldom takes good root in this world, but still it spreads a sweet perfume around it, while some innocent life bears it through to a better country.

But Satan keeps a bad imitation of it. And it is just that which fills sensation-novels, and crowds the Divorce Court, and the Police Court, and most of the other courts —regal and legal.

And Satan contrives to have them both called by the same name, so that fools should not know them apart! And the result is, that respectable fools are generally afraid of either, except in poetry and story-books..

II.

MISS FELICIA.

MY brother Edward looked very gravely at me one day last spring. He thought he saw the first symptoms of second childhood. What but dotage could prompt a woman of my age, with servants at command, to go through the rain to make some trumpery purchase at the far end of the village? He spoke so softly to me, and waited upon me at dinner, as if he thought my activity had followed my wits. I should have liked to box his ears for his pains. Though I am older than he, I do not seem like it; and I can never help hoping that I shall die before I need to be taken care of. I trust it is not very wicked, for I foster another hope, that God will fit me to his will, whatever that will may be; and, as long as we keep that foremost, I do not think He will be angry with a wish that waits patiently in the background. God may choose to pour his loving-kindness into the little moulds of our fancy. Does not the Psalmist say, "Grant thee according to thine own heart?" So I am always silent while they pray, "From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us."

I wonder what Edward would think if he knew that after I bought the cotton and tapes which formed the excuse for my extraordinary rainy walk on that miserable morning, I went on still farther—past the field which ter-

minates Love Lane, and up the broad High Road, and stopped before the great gates of the Clockhouse. How astonished the lodgekeeper was to see me! "But, I'm glad you've happened to come this way," she said, "for the carpets will be taken up to-night, and that's the beginning of the end that won't leave one stone upon another. So you've got just the last chance of a look over the old place."

The Clockhouse stands in its own grounds; that is to say, it has a wide lawn in front, and a flower-garden, orchard, and paddock behind. It is a long, red-brick house, only one story high, with four bow windows and a great porch on its basement, and eight smaller windows above. A square tower rises over the porch, and is adorned by a clock and a weather-vane. The house was built in the reign of James I., by a family named Dimsdale, of some condition in the country, who distinguished themselves on the republican side, in the subsequent civil war.

It is little information to say that the presiding Dimsdale of my youth was a Mr. Hewett, for nearly all the eldest sons of the family had been of that ilk,—a peculiarity which threw so much confusion and perplexity over their domestic history, that a wag of the house had once suggested the propriety of distinguishing them by numerals. But the Mr. Hewett Dimsdale of my early recollections, was the last who ever bore the name. When I first remember him, he was far past his prime; though his only daughter, of the same age as myself, was still in very early childhood. He had come into his estates rather late in life; and, as he was of a jovial, easy nature, one of those prone to make large and often needless concessions to the comfort of others, I imagined he preferred

remaining single to disturbing his aged mother's dominion at the Clockhouse. However, her death left him a free and wealthy bachelor at forty-seven; and, as soon as the period of mourning was over, he took a trip to London, as my mother used to say, greatly to the consternation of the local families, amongst whom there was a sufficient amount of unappropriated beauty to render the possible escape of a rich man, of handsome exterior and unimpeachable character, a most unwelcome event. But Mr. Hewett Dimsdale was bent on seeing the world, and it is to be presumed that he set about so doing, in the stereotyped fashion, by putting himself under the charge of an old neighbor's son, long resident in the West End of the metropolis, who sought to improve him, rustic from the society of squires and yeomen, by the conversation of actresses and singers, and such small fashionable wits and *littérateurs*, as are easily accessible to any unknown man of moderate means. The dames and demoiselles in the granges and halls round Mallowe shook their heads and sought to convince themselves that the sheep which had gone out from their fold was only a black sheep after all. But Mr. Hewett Dimsdale had carried his honest country heart to the flippant city—a heart like a sturdy wildflower, able to survive a rough wind or a foul odor. His virtues were not of the mimosa type, instinctively shrinking from evil, rather they hardily refused to see it, or to believe in it. The people among whom he went told unkind stories even of each other, but that he set down as "scandal," and rebuked it with such honest heartiness that the very echo of vice died out in his presence. I remember when I was a girl, a little withered woman came to our shop, who had been in the coterie to which Mr.

Dimsdale was introduced. I think she had been an actress, or an actor's wife, and she did not mince matters, or soften phrases ; but what struck me were these words : "He believed in us so thoroughly, that it made us wish we could believe in ourselves." One of the reminiscences of my own childhood is, of being taken into the shop to speak to the old gentleman. I had spent a naughty morning, and when he stroked my head, and called me "a dear, good little girl—mammy's blessing," I turned to my mother, sobbing out : "Tell him I'm not good at all, and I'm a great trouble to you!" Ah, God purifies the world by gentle zephyrs as well as by north winds!

From those West End back drawing-rooms, with their tarnished gilding and faded damask—fitting types of the lives lived in them—Mr. Hewett Dimsdale brought home a wife, by name Felicia Sherlett. The Sherletts had emerged from obscurity before the Dimsdales. They had family traditions nearly two hundred years earlier. Instead of the grave, simple stories of the Cromwellian Hewett Dimsdale, brave and true, and loyal with the highest loyalty, and of the honest gentlemen who had kept his name as stainless as he left it, they had legends of crusaders and troubadours, of knights in the suite of shameful Queen Isabel's "gentle Mortimer," of a name mentioned in Catherine Howard's divorce, of more than one familiar in Whitehall, and so on, through tawdry makeshifts and disgraceful debt, to Felicia Sherlett's father, half adventurer, half sponge, and whole scoundrel. Very likely Hewett Dimsdale thought him nothing worse than "a very clever fellow, but without ballast." Felicia Sherlett must have been nearly thirty when the Squire first met her ; and, though she had been a motherless girl, left in

very dangerous places, no more damaging report reached the Mallowe gossips, than that she might be styled either a "companion" or a "professional musician," since her father had often left her to eke out her existence by such services, though, as they were rendered to people who knew all about her family-name, and the mortgaged estate in Sunderland, her remunerations had been wavering returns in kind, rather than business-like payments of cash. A strange, heart-starved life, from which a larger soul must have risen into saintliness, or sunk into the deeper depths behind those back drawing-rooms. If Miss Sherlett had had a better nature, she might have had a worse character. Neither bad nor good seed will flourish on stony ground. But she was one of those women who can be quite satisfied by silk dresses, and old china, and tea-parties, and by dint of flattery and fawning, and a fortitude worthy a better cause, she had always been able to secure a certain share of these luxuries. She might wear her heart out in scheming to obtain the more, without losing the less, and she might swallow insults and endure contumely till her whole moral nature was as impervious as tanned leather, but she was tolerably safe from one group of temptations, though none the purer for such safety.

When Mr. Dimsdale met her she was "staying" at the house of some civil servant, her connection by marriage; where, in return for board, lodging, and presents of such dresses as her cousin tired of, she was expected to endure all that lady's caprices, and all the unchidden rudeness of the olive branches. I dare say, her unfortunate position was her first charm to Hewett Dimsdale. I can understand how she would intuitively read

his chivalrous heart, and then turn towards him the pathetic side of the annoyances which had long ceased to sting her. A forlorn hope which she had tried so often, that all painful excitement had left it; but she had a strong courage, and did it once again, even while she turned over in her mind schemes concerning lady-housekeeping, and chaperoneships, and such other grooves where a well-born woman may find bread, till she slips out of sight in the dust of the family vault—not yet mortgaged.

I wonder how she felt in her first retirement, after Hewett Dimsdale made his offer? Depend on it, she knew all about the Clockhouse, and the rent-roll, long before that. Was there a spark of gratitude struck in that battered, hardened heart, a spark that might brighten into a flame of love, that should re-vitalize it into new youth? Or, did she just take it as another barter—a better bargain than she had made before,—a longer "stay" for better board and lodging, and dresses at first hand? Did she pout a little at the thought of the country house among clodhoppers, and then reflect that it might prove an easier condition than her cousin's vapors, and the children's insolence? I dare say, the thought which stirred her deepest in that personal soul which everybody keeps somewhere, though it may be shallow and small, was the shock which it would give to the circle she was leaving. Of course, I did not know her till years after; but, reading her backwards, I can guess that she was cruel in her petty triumph, and that, during the very few weeks of her engagement she gave her connections a liberal return of the humble-pie she had eaten at their hands, and that the cousin, in whose house she closed her maiden

career, was very minutely taught the distinction between the wife of a mere official, and the lady of a landed proprietor.

Hewett Dimsdale had her portrait painted on their marriage. It represents a slender woman, with wide open blue eyes, very pink cheeks, a long neck, and a lackadaisical droop of the head,—so much the lineaments which smirk at us from most of the fashionable portraits of the Regency, that one is inclined to question its individuality. Yet, when I knew her, Mrs. Dimsdale's countenance certainly had one trait of which a good artist could have made a strong point. She had a steel-trap mouth. There was no fleshiness about its muscles, no humorous little dimple beneath the lower lip, no curve at its corners to tell tales of cheerfulness or discontent. It was a mouth made to eat and to speak,—and especially to scold, in a satirical, rasping, genteel way, but not a mouth for whispering or kissing.

Well, Hewett Dimsdale seemed quite satisfied with her. He thought her a superior being. He was of a hopeful, credulous nature, and if there were a few corners of his heart which she did not fill, he thought it was because she was too large, and not too little! This is what all the village people said of the Dimsdales. This is how we human beings judge. If anybody is cheerful, let us say it is because they do not feel! That prevents their contentment being any reflection upon ourselves, who have finer feelings and nerves than anybody else since the world began. Perhaps Hewett Dimsdale very soon understood his wife perfectly, and in his great pitiful tenderness thought more of her loss, in not being all he had fancied her, than of his own. She was

a good wife in her own way. She ruled his household with a strict hand, and she made his income go half as far again as it had ever gone before, and she had faultless dinners and dressed perfectly, and was as good a sick nurse as any woman can be, who has no idea that an invalid needs anything beyond dainty diet and punctual medicines. And all of these attentions Hewitt Dimsdale appeared to receive with a wondering, touching gratitude. Was it because he knew these were all that she could give,—because he was so sorry that she could give no more? Is there not always a pathetic value set on the little that is, which might be so much greater? Is not the sickly flower reluctantly growing in a stony town garden more valued than all the gay beauties in the florist's greenhouse? Do not the far-between letters and stray gifts of the spendthrift child win something which the life-long service of the dutiful son does not obtain? Is there not joy in heaven over the one sinner who repenteth more than over the ninety-nine just men who need no repentance? God forgive me, but to put in plain words the feeling which has often lurked at the bottom of my heart, it has seemed to me that the bent of human nature is to be unjust, and that God encouraged it. Well,—I know better now, and it comforts me that the prodigal's father did not say one angry word to his sulking elder son, while he patiently explained, "Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Ah, the prodigal brought to himself would not have again gone through his rebellion, and debauchery, and husks, for the sake of the welcome and the fatted calf. Depend on it, he dropped one or two bitter tears in that festival, sighing, "To think how I grieved

so good a father!" For if not, he would be tolerably sure to go back to his dissipations, comforting himself that if they failed him again he would know where to turn, until at last he would grow to prefer the husks and "liberty" to the fatted calf and his father's presence, and would come back no more.

As I said before, the Dimsdales had but one daughter, and it happened that she was born on the same day as myself, which invested me with a sort of interest in the kindly eyes of the Squire, and from that time the friendship with which he had always favoured my father was widened to include my mother and the baby. Both my parents and he were simple-minded people, among whom no troublesome thoughts of class arose. They did not know that because one lived by the produce of his ancestral fields, and the other by his shop, they ought to be natural enemies. It never occurred to my father to ask himself troublesome questions, such as why he, a God-fearing, well-instructed man, with whom the Squire loved to argue, though he always had the worst of it, was yet never invited to dine at the Clockhouse, while the master of Hopleigh Manor, a sot and a clown, sat at the Dimsdale board at least once a month. Neither of them ever bothered themselves about such matters. The Squire came to the shop, and sat on the counter, and talked and laughed, and on one occasion got so deep in discussion that he was almost too late for a dinner party at the Manor-house. He used to talk to my mother about "Mrs. Dimsdale," and to let her know that he talked to Mrs. Dimsdale about her. He told her how Mrs. Dimsdale wished their little girl looked as healthy as I. How Mrs. Dimsdale admired some snug winter

hood my mother had made for me, in place of some aggravating bonnet that was always slipping off my head. And at last, one day he brought Mrs. Dimsdale with him to look at some engraving which my father had on sale. A shower came on while they were in the shop, and the lady was good enough to step into our parlour until the carriage could be sent round. There she partook of a cup of tea. I was about seven years old at the time, but I remember that visit as well as I remember yesterday. What a long feather she had on her bonnet. How fast she talked. How my mother was "dear madam" at every sentence. What a little darling I was. How she had never tasted nicer tea. What a love of a dog we kept. What a sweet place the parlour was; the whole twenty windows of the Clockhouse hadn't such a prospect as we enjoyed from its solitary casement. And would my mother give her the recipe for the delightful tea-cakes? My mother was writing it out when the Squire came back. He awaited its conclusion just a little impatiently, calling me to him and asking me if I would like to see real oranges growing on a tree. He had some, would I like to look at them?—ending with an invitation that I should go to the Clockhouse next day, and have a game with his little Felicia, and partake of strawberries and cream with her and her nurse.

When they were gone, my mother was enthusiastic in Mrs. Dimsdale's praises, but my father made a queer face and said, "She keeps plenty of small change, but his least coin is genuine gold."

I spent a very pleasant day at the Clockhouse. It is the first gala which I distinctly remember. Miss Felicia

was about half a head shorter than me—a fair, transparent-looking child, whom I at once made my ideal of loveliness, and put her face and figure into all my favourite story-book heroines. Miss Felicia did not talk very much, and she was not quick at learning games, nor very lively in playing them, but she had gentle little ways of taking hold of one's hand, or putting one's sash neat when it came awry. Her father called her "Mousie," and it seemed the most appropriate name for the little thing who crept into your heart you didn't know why.

From that time, I occasionally spent a day at the Clockhouse. Not sufficiently often for us to feel it awkward to call each other "Miss Felicia" and "Miss Ruth," but yet often enough for a considerable attachment to grow up between Felicia and me. I was fascinated by her softness and grace, and she had a foolish admiration and reverence for the prizes which I brought every half year to show the Squire and his lady. I never missed a prize whenever prizes were given, and the last half-year I was at school I won three. It was not because I was very bright, but because the other girls were very stupid. But that is just what one may say of the prize-winners in the world as well as at school. Why, those we call great men are only great because the mob is so little. Don't you feel when you study the very grandest life, "This great man was no more than he ought to be, nor so much—but then I, and most people, are so terribly less. He is not even quite up to the mark which God has set on our own consciousness as the normal height of humanity, but he is so much nearer to it than we are." And when you read the wise sayings of the wisest—Shakespere, Bacon, Solomon even—does not a

voice in you reply to them that you knew it all beforehand—that their words are only like the fire bringing out the illegible writing on your own mind. Are we not something like people who have lost their memories in fever or madness, and must learn over again what they have forgotten. Does not what we call genius seem to be well typified by that sudden flash with which doctors tell us such lost learning sometimes returns? Is not all our mental and moral movement less a progress than a return—a return from the muffled chambers of Satan's bedlam to the intelligence and industry of the Father's house? Is not all crime lunacy, and all weakness idiotic? But after all, the important question is, What am I, and what are you?

"If I went to school I shouldn't get any prizes," said Felicia Dimsdale, standing in her sixteen-years' beauty, with my three prizes in her hand, and the evening sunlight on her white dress. "I wish I was clever; I think it would please mamma so much, for mamma praises you very often."

"I am not clever—not a bit," I replied, "only I don't like to be beaten. So I make up my mind to do a thing, and I just go and do it."

Felicia smiled at that. "It is very well for you to say so, dear," she answered, "and yet I can't help wishing, that just for once you might understand what it is to want to do something, and yet not be able to do it. For instance, I always wish to rise early, yet, somehow, I never get up when I am called."

"Quite your own fault," I said; "you should not take a moment's thought about it, but jump straight up, and it is done."

Felicia shook her head. "I know what I should do well enough," she replied; "the worst of it is I can't do it."

"Ask God to help you, and then try your hardest," I said.

"Is it worth while to ask God to help one to get up in the morning?" she asked, almost pitifully.

"Of course it is," I replied. "If we do not ask God's help till we want it for something worthy of it, we shall never ask it at all."

"Do you always act up to this?" she asked, but not mockingly.

"No," I said, "but I don't blame God by saying that I can't. I know it is because I won't."

Miss Dimsdale and I did not have another private conversation for a long time. They paid a lengthened visit to the seaside that autumn, in consequence of a sudden failure in the Squire's health. Except two or three letters, we had no communication until near Christmas. And Felicia's letters were not of that kind which keep an absent friend strongly in our view, and sometimes report changes even better than spoken words. They were sweet, affectionate letters, beginning with "dearest," and signed "your loving friend;" but there was nothing in them except that it was a beautiful day, and the Squire was much better and had been able to take a ride, and mamma sent her kindest regards, and hoped that dear Mrs. Garrett was keeping quite safe from her troublesome rheumatism. Felicia wrote that large rambling hand which would take a quire to express a thought, and a ream to tell a story.

At Christmas the Squire always gave a party to the

young people of the neighbourhood. None of the county people were asked to fraternise with us, and prove the glorious equality of humanity by dancing with us, and befooling us,—and not recognising us next day. The very cream of this Clockhouse party were people who only "got in" to sit by the wall at the county assemblies — the curate's children, and the doctor's son, and the lawyer's daughters. The rest of us belonged to tenant-farmers and tradespeople, and such odds and ends as the excise officer, and the professor of music and so forth. In short there was nobody there who might not take anybody else's compliments or attentions in all sincerity, and not as a mere voluntary subscription to an Anglicised and Tory version of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity." Any of the guests might have married the other—not without heart-burnings—for I don't suppose there ever was a marriage that satisfied everbody—but without scandal. And I always consider that is the grand gusto of any party. No marriage need ever come off, but the very possibility is exciting!

Generally speaking, there was nobody but old neighbours at the Clockhouse party. Most of the girls knew what each other would wear, and helped in making each other's finery, and had occasionally exchanged it. But that year there was one stranger—a young man of about two-and-twenty. Not handsome, but with a face that meant something. Felicia told me that her father had made his acquaintance at the seaside, while the youth had been taking holiday from his studies in the Temple. His name was Markham Pavitt. He was to be a barrister. "Where was his home?" I asked—"anywhere near Mallowe?" He had no home, Felicia answered.

She had a pretty, plaintive note in her voice which said pathetic things very sweetly. His own people were all dead, except one uncle in the north of England. His father had been a dissenting minister. He lived in lodgings in London, and supported himself during his studies by writing for the papers. She had seen some of his articles, and she should think they were very clever, but they were not about subjects that she could understand. They were political. Was it not awful that a young man scarcely six years older than herself, should be so clever! And then she went off to dance the first dance with him, as he was a stranger.

Ah, those Clockhouse parties were very delightful! This morning, as I went through the rooms, I could not realize that nearly fifty years have passed since that last one. Fifty years! And nearly all who were there have gone before me! But what seems stranger than all the changes is the something that has not changed, the something in myself that does not feel a bit older for all those fifty years. I don't feel so excitedly glad or sorry nowadays, because my party have gone home before me, and taken my personal interest with them, and I am just sitting waiting in the little station, till the coach comes back for me, and then my story will begin again! And in the meantime, I talk to the people who are waiting too, and if I see a cobweb in any corner, I try to knock it down. So the time passes pleasantly enough, and not unprofitably. Yes, Markham Pavitt's first Christmas party at the Clockhouse was my last one. My dear father died in the following February, and through one event and another my life changed into quite a different tune. There was my brother Edward to be started in

the world, and though we could do very little for him beyond a dozen shirts and stockings and six handkerchiefs, still the anxiety of the thing is much the same in all these cases. He got his situation through Mr. Dimsdale speaking a good word for him to the great city merchant, Mr. Lambert, who had been an old school-fellow of his. That was the way with Mr. Dimsdale. He did not do good by fits and starts—now and then stuffing himself with philanthropy till it brought on a moral indigestion, and then starving it off. He did not know he was doing good. He did good as naturally as he ate his dinner and never thought about it. If he were alive to day, he would never dream of tracing Edward's affluence to his kind letter of introduction. He was not like those people who drop a seed of kindness—after holding it so long in their hot, reluctant hands that half its vitality is gone—and then keep routing up its soil to see if it is sprouting; and when it is they must have the first flower, because they planted it, and the last one for the same reason, until the poor shrub is ready to cry out, "I had as well never been planted at all, as not to have a single blossom for myself!" He was not like Miss Vix, who once thought she had a right to interfere in a girl's love affairs because she had given her a cast-off gown to go to service in. I don't say that the recipient of a favour should measure their gratitude by its magnitude. Far from it. Besides, a cup of cold water given when we are faint is better than Burgundy when we are dead. And the measure of gratitude is the plummet of the heart that renders it. But directly gratitude is demanded as a debt, the creditor should be willing to receive payments—by instalments or otherwise; and when the

account is clear the debtor should have a right to demand a receipt. For if it is all resolved into a mere business-like matter of giving and taking, let it be done in a business-like way. If it is a matter above business, or if it is a stray bit of the business of that country where we shall pay our way with another currency than gold and silver, then rest assured that it is all entered in the ledgers up there, and we need not to trouble ourselves with any private day-book of our own.

The Squire himself gave but one party after my last one. From all I heard of that evening, it was not what some of the former ones had been. Mr. Dimsdale's health was fast failing. He could not stand up to dance, and he could not offer his arm to take anybody to supper, because he could not walk without a stick. The night of changes had begun, that grey twilight was just stealing on when we look at each other as if to see whether anybody notices anything, though we only say that the sun will be out again presently, and our game will be as merry as ever!

I heard that Felicia seemed very nervous about her father, as if she did not even care to dance while he sat still in pain and weakness. But still she danced twice with Markham Pavitt, who was reported, rather meaningly, to be "in high favour with the Squire." Mrs. Dimsdale was not at all alarmed about her husband; and it was observed that she was a sensible woman, who did not think that people had nothing to do but to die the moment they were not quite so strong as they had once been. The music, I was told, was not as good as usual, and in his supper-time speech the Squire had made a pretty allusion to the fact that a certain youth

who for several years had made sweet melody on the Clockhouse piano, had taken his talents to London. "It will be a proud day for us," said the dear old gentleman, "when people begin to tell that the great musician, Richard Carewe, was born at Mallowe. And by the time my Felicia there is an old lady, perhaps our old instrument will be quite a valuable heirloom, just because he once played upon it." The good old Squire! That was so like him! But Felicia did not live to be an old lady, and Richard Carewe died a beggar's death before that year was out, and the housekeeper tells me the piano is to be given to a small school in the neighbourhood, where, for a trifling consideration, the children of foolish parents are taught a smattering of everything useless. This morning I ran my fingers softly up its notes. (It is all out of tune, but it has a sound—like the echo of the song that used to be in my heart.) I am not sentimental —oh no. That was never one of the accusations laid at my door. But still I would have bought that old piano if it had been for sale. And I would not give much for your youth, if you would not make a fool of yourself for any relic that savoured of it.)

The Squire was seen in the village but very seldom after that party. And then he was in a Bath chair, with his wife or daughter walking by his side. His mind broke up. Not that he doted or drivelled. He felt the change himself. "I'm being made over again, Miss Ruth," he used to say. "I've lived to be an old man, but I'm to go into heaven as a poor little child after all. No, my dear, I don't want that learned book now" (it was some political work, whose publication both him and my own dear father had anxiously expected). "There won't

be Whigs or Tories where I'm going, my dear. Let me see some of the children's books; I'm sure you keep some nice ones that you recommend to the little people. Give me whatever is the general favourite. There is a deal more in these children's books than middle-aged people can see. Something about an angel in this one, isn't there, my dear? That will do. My remembrances to your mother, Miss Ruth, and I'm glad to hear her boy in London is always doing well. Good-bye."

That was the last time I saw him. He died very gently, and lived two or three days longer than the doctors expected. After he had almost ceased to speak, he suddenly asked for Markham Pavitt, in consequence of which Mrs. Dimsdale sent for the young man, who promptly travelled from London to his old friend's bedside. From the reports I heard, I used to picture the scene in the old crimson bedchamber—the sick man, smiling sometimes, as if the angels were already talking to him, smiling, other times, at the little white-lipped daughter, sitting holding his hand in hers—the young man, in his physical and intellectual vigour, awed and humbled as Death awes and humbles youth and health—and Mrs. Dimsdale, in her worst morning dresses, with her possets and her pills, and the rouge very badly put on her sharp, seamy face. And day after day, those four were drawn together, and the doctors came and went, and nobody but Markham knew when Felicia stepped behind the curtains to let the tears fall down. And nobody but those two were in the room when the Squire went away. They thought he was asleep, and could not tell the time of his departure within half-an-hour. Perhaps he scarcely knew himself. He had

brought such an aroma of peace and love about him, that one may fancy he could not discern the change to a heavenly atmosphere as sharply as some of us might.

He had left instructions that his funeral and monumental tablet should be as plain as possible, and poor Mrs. Dimsdale's peculiar style of mourning could find no vent save in an extraordinary quantity of crape. The mother and daughter went to some watering-place immediately after the funeral, as it was said, for the benefit of Felicia's health. Of course, the Clockhouse and all the estate was hers now, free from all charges except a very handsome allowance to the widow.

Felicia had never showed any interest in village affairs up to that time—not even to the extent of accompanying her mother to the ladies' sewing parties, and such other charitable meetings, where all the evils of the Fall are proposed to be redressed by gallons of soup made on economical principles, and by flannel bought at a loss to the draper, and made into petticoats by amateurs, lest the honest hire of needlewomen should deduct a trifle from the alms to be bestowed on paupers.

But soon after the Squire's death, whether from a sense of her responsibility as a landed proprietor, or from a dutiful wish to follow out her father's wishes, or from some other cause, Miss Dimsdale set about earnestly promoting certain reforms in the neighbourhood of the Clockhouse, among which I remember a row of labourers' cottages, and a provident fund. Her personal supervision would have been of little use, even could she have given it, and the steward was a stiff feudalist, who could not see "why folks should not go on living in the same style as their fore-

fathers. Hated to hear talk of the requirements of health and decency. Believed there were more people lived to a hundred years in the old times than now. And decency did not mean the same thing with one set of people as with another. Swells might go on talking about that stuff and nonsense till they'd build little dressing-rooms in their ploughmen's cottages." So, somehow, the charge of Felicia's schemes got into Markham Pavitt's hands, and whenever the young barrister could spare a few days from London, he spent them in Mallowe.

Now, I made believe I was brave enough about carrying on my father's business and keeping up the old home for my mother and myself, but I had some private qualms at times. I know now that private qualms are hopeful symptoms of success. They make one scorn no honest means to keep on the safe side of fortune. So whenever we could, we let our little drawing-room and the best bed-chamber, and contented ourselves with the attics and the parlour behind the shop. And Mr. Pavitt made his home in our lodgings off and on, during the whole period of the Dimsdales' absence, which was fully two years ; since after their stay by the sea they wintered in Paris, and spent the next season wandering about the German baths. Mrs. Dimsdale had endured more than twenty years of meals at her own table, and nights in her own bed, and service from her own domestics, and so doubtless enjoyed with greater gusto the *tables-d'hôte*, and hired chambers, and all the other discomforts, which had a flavour of her old Bohemian days, without their sting of neglect and need.

Everybody in Mallowe soon learned a great respect for

Markham Pavitt. Not that his character had very much of the commoner elements of popularity. He was too sensible and self-reliant. There was nothing of the beau in his politeness to women; the elder ones might have been his aunts, and the younger ones his sisters, his manner towards them was so free from all suspicion of flirtation. Not that I set it down as a virtue when a young man appears to feel no pleasing titillation in female society, nor to have any sly preference for a little talk with a sprightly woman, rather than a most sensible conversation with a friend in whiskers. Quite the reverse, unless there is a reason for it. God meant the very dearest friendship of this life to be between man and woman. And until we have felt the real thing we often feel a vague enjoyment in a sort of make-believe. But I thought there was a reason for Markham Pavitt's frank reserve and happy indifference. Those little delicate foreign letters that came so often! Do what he might, he could not help showing some restlessness when a post passed without one; and when one came, I think we might have given him raw pork for dinner that day, and he would never have noticed it, nor been any the worse! And as the foreign letters were at all pleasing to him, it was no wonder that they were very pleasing, for they came often. Well! pleasure is not so cheap in this world, that we need call it dear at postage-rates, even if our correspondent will live abroad, and does write a scrambling hand like Felicia's, and has not very much to say, except "dearest" and "Yours most affectionately." Not that I say that is how she began and ended her letters to Markham Pavitt. Neither do I say it is how she did not.

And so early spring came round, the second early spring since the Squire died. And suddenly the Clockhouse windows were thrown open, and there was a grand airing of rooms and bedding. The ladies were coming back. Markham Pavitt was staying at our house at the time, but he had not received a foreign letter for some weeks, and he had the announcement, like the rest of us, from the old steward.

So a week or two went by, and then an epistle came for our lodger. Its postmark was Brighton. I took it to him myself at breakfast-time, but, of course, he did not open it until I went away. And when he met me on the stairs, half-an-hour after, he told me that we might expect them at the Clockhouse by the end of March. Were they quite well? Oh yes, thank you, or at least he supposed so, they did not say they were not. Then I knew that something was wrong. And I had great sympathy with the young man when I heard him pacing up and down our drawing-room that evening, though I confess I also had some feeling for the carpet, which was of best Brussels, and I did not quite see where another was to come from when it was worn out. Do you know, I think that happy married people should all subscribe to a general fund, to be applied in repairing the damages done by unhappy lovers?

Mr. Pavitt went up to the Clockhouse to meet the ladies on their return, but he was not away more than an hour, nor did he go back again in the evening. He ate one slice of bread-and-butter for his tea that day, and he did not have the candles lighted, but lay on the sofa in the dark, and actually let the fire go out. He had such a fearful headache, he said, that the heat and

light seemed to drive him into a fever. The servant-girl brought us down this report, and my mother took up his supper herself, with an innocent desire to offer advice and condolence to the solitary sufferer. "Well, I'll not trouble him again," she said when she came back, "I never saw anybody with such a cantankerous way of taking a Christian kindness. 'Just leave me to myself!' indeed! He'll not have occasion to say that to me twice, nor to any one else either, I suspect, for it's exactly what the world is always over-inclined to do!"

The next day was Sunday. Such a wet, wet Sunday! I remember I stood at our window for nearly a quarter of an hour before I could raise my courage to starting-point. Mr. Pavitt went off in good time, without any hesitation. "If he was so bad last night," said my mother, "I should think he might have been thankful he was not obliged to go out, and have settled himself at home, and read his Bible."

I expected to see the Clockhouse pew empty. For in the Squire's time, the horses were never brought out on Sunday, and whoever did not care to face bad weather remained at home. But as I approached the church, I saw a carriage drive away, and I passed the gate just in time to see a light figure flutter up the sloppy path before me. It was Miss Felicia.

She had the pew to herself, for Mr. Pavitt, who had used it during the absence of the family, had now retired to a side-seat. From time to time I stole a glance at Miss Felicia. Her face had once had a pathetic mingling of both her parents. The likeness to the mother predominated now, only leaving a peculiar softness of lip,

which had certainly never belonged to Mrs. Dimsdale. She had been a simple well-bred girl when she left the Clockhouse. She was a fine lady now, with a constant mental oscillation between raptures and nonchalance. She had left off her mourning, and her dress had advanced with herself. There was a woman's life put into its finical elaboration, whose highest aim could be the discontent and destruction of all the female parishioners. And yet, in sermon-time, when she leaned her head in the pew-corner, the self-consciousness that she had learned under the eyes of French counts and German barons died away, and she looked very like the old Felicia Dimsdale.

Service over, she rose, and gave one quick, sharp look towards Markham Pavitt. It said, plainly enough for me, let alone for him, "You may speak to me in the porch." And accordingly, as I came slowly down the gallery-stairs, I saw them meet. Ah, he was not all composure, always, that young barrister! How she looked up at him! And beautiful eyes she had. They walked down the sloppy path together, he through the puddles, at the side, she daintily picking her way from one stone to another, through the middle. Her carriage was waiting at the end, and she stepped in, and shook hands with him out of it, and yet kept him a moment longer to say something further, in such a pretty eager way, as if she would rather the moment were an hour.

Next morning, the Clockhouse steward came to our shop to buy something. My mother happened to serve him, and as usual they had a little gossip. I chanced to enter the shop in time to hear:

"Yes, Mrs. Garrett, I suppose it will be a match. He

was about with them a great deal in Germany, and he travelled all the way home with them. And he's not the sort of man to be bothered about ladies' luggage for nothing. He's staying at the Clockhouse now—put into the best spare chamber, which was never opened except for married couples ; and for the matter of that, I dare-say he'd have preferred the common bachelor visitor's bed-room, where he might enjoy a pipe without fear of poisoning the house. But when ladies want to do a body honor, they are sure to do it in their own way, and one must take the will for the deed. Well, he's not what you or I would call a steady young man, Mrs. Garrett ; but these gentry, you know, are above those common sort of virtues. He is very well,—bets a little too much perhaps. But it is a fine estate, take it for all in all, and if Mrs. Dimsdale makes the match, the Squire himself could not have done better for his daughter."

"What is all that about?" I inquired as soon as the old man was gone.

"Mr. George Shirley, of Shirley Hall," said my mother ; "he is staying at the Clockhouse, and they say he is courting Miss Felicia. Well, there have been queer things said of him—and not so long ago either. But perhaps they were not half true."

I had seen Mr. George Shirley, whose father's early death had made him already the proprietor of a large estate about twenty miles from Mallowe. He was a six-foot high young man, a king at cricket, the rival of the best jockeys of the county, and one of those with an inclination to "follow strong drink," only kept in some check by his love for athletic sports. The doubtful stories to which my mother alluded, were darker shades in his

character, but they were all in that melancholy keeping which made you feel that if they were not the truth, probably the truth was very like them. And this was the rival of sober, cleanly, studious Markham Pavitt, for whom, by the way, there came a note from the Clockhouse that very evening. And next morning he paid the Dimsdales a brief visit previous to his return to London.

At the close of that week, Miss Dimsdale came to our shop. She sat down on the chair her father had always used, and "vowed it was delightful to see the dear old place once more." She had come to ask a great, great favor. Mamma had just started off with Mr. George Shirley on a visit to his mother at Shirley Hall. And while they would all be enjoying themselves at their whist, and so forth (not that she envied them—it would be dreadfully tame after Wiesbaden—but nevertheless it was their pleasure), she was to be left all alone at the Clockhouse, as dull—as dull—as dull as what is the dullest thing that is?—a canary, with an old maid's black silk apron over its cage! Well, if she could not be ornamental to society, it was a very good opportunity to be useful. And so she was going to put the Clockhouse library in order. Mr. Pavitt had wanted the loan of a book the other day, and she had not been able to find it, everything was in such horrible confusion. But the worst of it was, you could not always tell what books were from their titles, and if she was left to herself and the servants, she was sure they would mix up the divinity and the science. Would I come and help her? She would not work me too hard, I could trust her for that, couldn't I? And then we would have luncheon

together in her own little room, and it would be like old times, and so nice!

Of course I went. But it was not like old times. We can no more have back old times by gathering the same people in the same place, than we could have back a dead friend by seating his skeleton in his accustomed chair. It was one thing to go to the Clockhouse when I was my father's petted child, in a white muslin as good as Miss Felicia's own, with no appreciable difference between her fine lace and my neat tuckers. And quite another thing now I was a self-dependent woman, with gnawing forecastings about rent and taxes, and a little over-carefulness about my best dress that must last at least another season. Do you say how small these things are! But is not everything small? And the people who think anything too small to take into consideration, are not they often the smallest of all?

We borrowed holland aprons from the housekeeper, and set about our task. I thought we were to be thoroughly in earnest, but I soon found that Miss Felicia was not, and that the library arrangement was a mere excuse to justify her in inviting such an inferior. Now that was a feeling that would never have come between the Squire and my father. They knew more politics than I did, but they kept them outside their hearts, and only discussed them as Adam and Eve may have discussed the tree of knowledge of good and evil before they ate of it. I never can do that. Whenever I catch a theory, I always yoke it to the nearest fact, and watch how they draw together. But then there is a deal in the harnessing. And in those days I had not had much practice. Else I should have accepted the position with a sly en-

joyment in the triumph of human nature over its liveries. As it was, I was fool enough to take umbrage, and to work as persistently as if it were an honest necessity that I should give real value for the wine and pheasant that we had for lunch.

"We'll not go back to the library just yet," said Miss Felicia, as the footman removed our plates. "I'm tired. And I shall be so glad of a talk. I suppose you will not confess that weakness. You would not leave your work till you died at it. But then you are a superior woman. I mean it. Dear me, but how important you must feel! It must be very nice to have something to do in the world. I wish I had."

"Well, Miss Felicia," I said, "the mistress of the Clockhouse fills a far more important place than Ruth Garrett of Mallowe Library."

"I don't think I have enough in me to fill any place," she answered, listlessly, and I was struck by the curious, faded look that came over her face at times.

"I thought you meant to be quite a Lady Bountiful," I remarked; "I am sure the cottages and the club——"

"Their merit all lies with Markham Pavitt," she replied, brightening. "He suggested them, and he has carried them out."

"Your money has enabled him to do so," I said.

"I daresay you miss Markham," she observed. "I was always so glad to know he was with you. I felt sure he would be comfortable. Isn't he nice? And so good and wise! Well, I am glad to be told how to do good," she went on. "I should like to make a little happiness for somebody. Miss Ruth, you can't imagine how miserable I feel sometimes. I don't know why, but

nevertheless the misery is dreadfully real. I can put it off pretty well when I am going to balls and parties, but when I am left to live quietly, like you live always, my dear, then I'm wretched! I don't expect you to understand it in yourself, but if you can only tell me what you think causes it, or how I might cure it. For you are so sensible. Papa always said so."

"Miss Felicia," I said, "the Hebrew kings used to consult the prophets, but very often they wanted an echo more than an oracle."

"You mean that you intend to bring some dreadful accusation against me," she observed, with a forced laugh, and a heightened color.

"I am not an oracle," I answered, "and I may think rightly or wrongly. But, Miss Felicia, whilst anybody plays a false part, they must not expect to be happy. Find out what is right, and then do it."

"It is not so easy," she said, shaking her head.

"Then find out what you mean to do, and do that," I replied, "and then either the devils or the angels will leave off troubling you."

"I think you have touched the truth of my trouble," she said, "but I'm afraid that won't help me. Miss Ruth, dear, tell me what you have heard. I'm sure you've heard something."

"That you are likely to marry Mr. Shirley," I replied.

"Well?" she said, in a dry hard tone.

"And I believe you have thought very differently yourself, and have helped somebody else to think very differently too."

"I know I have," she answered, starting up, and seizing my hand. "But I could not help it. I did not

mean any harm. I meant everything at the time. I did not know things would become so difficult. I had not thought it over. We were thrown together, Markham and I, in my time of sorrow. You can't wonder that I liked him, dear? Though if I'd had a grain of mamma's sense, I should have understood how far such liking should go. But I am never practical; she always says so. 'A thorough dreaming Dimsdale' she calls me."

"Dreaming or not, the Dimsdales have kept honor and prosperity for a long time," I said, with an indignant recollection of the stories I had heard of the Sherletts.

"She says I'd do very well in poetry, but not in the solid world, don't you see?" explained Felicia.

"I don't believe in any poetry but what has the solid world for its foundation," I said; "so if you jump off that, where can you alight but in chaos?"

"I cannot think why things are as they are," said Felicia, restlessly. "I liked Markham Pavitt. He was the man who could have made something of me if anybody could. And yet it is the will of God that I should marry somebody else."

"The will of God!" I echoed aghast. "How do you know?"

"Because I know it will end in that, and what is to be must be," she replied, rather wide of the mark.

"Then if you saw me trying to cut my throat, you would not do what you could to hinder me?" I asked.

"If it was ordained that you were to cut your throat, I should not be able to stop you," she said.

"But nobody knows what is ordained," I returned. "We need not flatter ourselves that we are in God's

secrets. We do not know what is his will, except that it cannot be his will that we should do wrong."

"But then what is wrong?" she asked. "Mamma says that I owe a great deal to my station in life. That I should think of the enlargement of my estate and the promotion of my family. Only poor Markham is so good, and always made me feel as if I might be something after all!"

"And you think the will of God is much more likely to be interested in the adding of acre to acre than in the enlargement of your soul," I said.

"You seem to imagine my sympathies are all enlisted against poor Markham," she pouted. "If you only knew what it is to sit hour after hour with George Shirley, trying to make believe that I understand all about his 'runs' and his 'wickets,' and all the other hateful cant of his abominable cricket, and then, for a change, play his favourite waltzes and polkas, which is all the music he cares about. I tell you the truth, Miss Garrett. I am often ready to drop through the floor with sheer weariness and disgust. He has required to write to me but two notes since our acquaintance, and if you only saw them! I'm certain that he stopped short in half the words to consult the dictionary how to finish them, and ——"

"Stop, Miss Felicia," I interrupted, "you tell me he is to be your husband—your lord and master. Say nothing now that you will regret then."

Her face flushed, but she defended herself. "I don't want to marry him," she said, "but I know I shall do it. Mamma says that it is right, and how am I to know that it is not? It seems to me that right is only a compara-

tive thing. Mamma holds one right, you hold another, perhaps I hold a third. How do you define right, Miss Garrett?"

"It is the effort to get our lives into tune in spite of the discord that Satan has set therein," I replied. "How far we shall succeed is in God's hands, but the effort He leaves in ours. Shall we throw it back at Him as naughty children throw their work at their teacher, though all that they are bidden is 'to try and do their best?'"

"But he knows beforehand what we shall do," she returned. "And it seems to me that I should not do as I do unless it was intended for some wise purpose. Am I to question the power that has decided that I am to be as I am?"

"Do you mean to say that whatever any of us do, must be right if we do it?" I asked. "As for the mysteries of God's foreknowledge and man's free-will, need we, who cannot understand each other, marvel that we do not comprehend the Most High? Dear Miss Felicia, are you not silencing your conscience by your imaginations? Does not a voice within you give a very plain rule about your duty, so plain that you are ready to turn from it like Naaman from Elisha's prescription of the Jordan waters?"

"Mamma says it is my distinct duty to marry George Shirley, and it occurs to me that this may be my appointed cross," she answered.

"Don't talk nonsense about your cross," I replied, almost angrily, driven out of patience by her lackadaisical manner. "Don't fear lest you are so much stronger than God that you will be able to get rid of any cross

that He means you to carry. You are only carrying this foolish cross of your own making, because you fear the hard words and thoughts that would surround you if you threw it down. They would be God's cross, Miss Felicia."

She was silent for a moment, and, I foolishly hoped, convinced. But she looked up and laughed, "You are a dear, good, earnest creature!" she said. "But of course we each think ourselves right, and I suppose we shall each fit into the place which is meant for us. Now, don't look terribly shocked, there's a darling! God means you to marry some good, hard-working doctor or minister." (That was all she knew about *that.*) "And a famous wife you will make him. I offer him my congratulations beforehand! As for poor Markham, he deserves somebody better than I am. Poor Markham! You don't think it will hurt him so very much, do you? You wouldn't believe how much I think about him. It even makes me cry sometimes!"

"Yes, the same kind of tears you give to a novel or a song where you enjoy the touching part the most," I said. "You would blame a washerwoman who stimulated her weariness with a little gin. And yet you are playing with two men's lives just to put a little excitement into your own." I spoke sternly. It was no matter then that she was Miss Felicia, and I was only Ruth Garrett. She had appealed to me as a friend, and when she had asked for truth, it was not for me to give her smooth lies instead.

We went back into the library, and talked no more of anything but the books. Before I went away she gave me a lace collar. And she looked into my face. And

I looked back into hers. Her eyes were so like her father's! And then she kissed me; and I left the Clock-house, and have never entered it again until to-day.

Only three months later she was married to George Shirley. Such a marriage as had not been in Mallowe for fully a hundred years. There were triumphal arches put up, and a whole ox was roasted on the green to feast the tenantry, and the school children stood all of a row in new bibs and tuckers, strewing costly flowers down the bridal path. All I know was hearsay, for I did not go to see the ceremony. That was my poor little protest. My mother said I punished myself, and did not hurt anybody else. But it always seems to me that without members there can't be mobs, and that if each member set a proper value on himself many a great mob would be less. My mother went, and she said it was quite a beautiful scene in the chancel, the bride was so lovely, and the dresses so graceful, and all in the bright June sunlight. Most auspicious! Ah, well, the happiest couple I ever heard of were married in a thunder-storm, with the sexton to give away the bride, and a half-blind pew-opener to hold her glove while the ring was put on, and no triumphal arch to pass under except the door of the little home they had got together during three happy courting years, where they had a famous *tête-a-tête* wedding breakfast of ham and eggs, before their honeymoon of four hours' duration among the stuffed lions in the British Museum. Does it not show the vulgar turn of my mind to remember the existence of such common people in the middle of narrating an alliance that actually had a paragraph to itself in the county newspaper?

One of the school children happened to come to my shop on the wedding evening. She still wore her white bib and tucker. Had she enjoyed herself? I asked. Yes. Did she like the bridegroom? No, she didn't. He was a nasty man. He trod straight upon a white rose that she threw out of her basket. She didn't think he could not help it. He seemed to put his foot on it on purpose. He was a nasty man! Poor girl! she lived to outlive her childish wisdom, and to fall like the white rose under the cruel tread of George Shirley, and then to sink out of sight in the reeking mire of some great town. Her father held George Shirley by the arm in the market-place while he told him some plain truths, for which "assault" he got a month's imprisonment with hard labour. Mrs. George Shirley must have read all about it in the same paper that had used such fine phrases at her wedding. She sent the man's wife a little money during his captivity. Poor Felicia!

I saw Markham Pavitt but thrice after Miss Dimsdale's marriage. The next summer he came to Mallowe about some business, and put up at his old quarters. No more fear of his wearing out my carpet. He sat and read his law-books as if there was not a woman in the world. Disappointments don't change us. They never ruin people who have not ruin in their nature. Only they are shafts sent to the very bottom of our souls, and whatever is there, whether gold or only copper, they bring it to the surface. But God help the girl's conscience who brings upon any man's face the look that was on Markham Pavitt's!

The Shirleys never settled at Shirley Hall or the Clock-house, but spent nearly all their time between London,

Bath, and the German gaming-places. Mrs. Dimsdale went with them at first. But she very soon came back to the Clockhouse, and it was reported that she did not say very sweet things of her son-in-law. She was paralyzed for years before she died. Mrs. Shirley occasionally came and stayed with her for a few days, and she used to drop into my shop, and gabble away about the novels she borrowed, two or three at a time. She looked like something that you've crumpled up in mistake, and then smoothed out again as well as you can. Perhaps that was through her dress. For, as soon as she was too old for finery, she grew a dreadful scarecrow. They had but one son, and George Shirley quarrelled with him for no better reason than because he was like himself. As soon as he came of age the hopeful young gentleman raised money on a post-obit. We heard of fearful scenes between the reprobate son and equally reprobate father, fastened to his easy chair, the bloated victim of vices which he had not left, but which had left him. George Shirley died before his wife, who spent her last days in lodgings at Tunbridge Wells, living long enough to know that her death would the sooner permit her son's creditors — horse-trainers and book-makers — to pounce upon the fair fields and stately homestead of the Dimsdales. When she died there was nobody with her but a maid-servant, who was afterwards prosecuted for taking a diamond-ring from the finger of the corpse.

I saw Markham Pavitt once more—when he was Judge at Hopleigh Assizes. He had married the daughter of a law lord, and his wife was with him, a pleasant, portly lady, in a black-velvet mantle edged with sable. I was told she always went with him on circuit, they were such

an affectionate couple. Judge Pavitt died about five years ago, leaving a very good name behind him, as an honest lawyer, a worthy man, and a humble Christian. His widow still lives. Their elder daughter is married to a dean, and the younger to a baronet, and their only son is a member of Parliament, and he it is who has just bought the Clockhouse and its estate from the assignees of the younger George Shirley.

And all that remains of Hewett Dimsdale's daughter is one badly-cut line at the bottom of George Shirley's tablet in Shirley Church.

"Also his wife Felicia."

When I hear people wonder how a God of love can leave any to perish, I often think that there will be nobody in hell but those who will go there in defiance of Him. We see people who will not take one step, or bear one prick to gain an earthly bliss that stands before their eyes. And where "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" to the bliss they cannot see, is it likely they will take the trouble to press thereunto? Need the admirers of free-will blame God for not forcing them into his glory against their will? Shall we blame Him for their perdition—Him, whose great heart of mercy was lonely in heaven for thirty-three years, while He lent his Son to bear the burden and learn the secrets of our shameful mortality?

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" What, indeed? And yet the devil generally cheats him out of even that bad bargain!

Alas, Felicia!

III.

A ROUGH DIAMOND.

OUR clergyman and my sister Ruth once had a discussion. (They have discussions pretty often.) This one originated in a conversation between him and me about some new Metropolitan Charitable Institution that Mr. Marten was advocating as if it were such a safe and sole panacea for all misery, that Ruth said afterwards that she could not help wondering how the world had existed so long without it, and if he could make out that the good Samaritan was connected with his Association, and that Dorcas employed its agency to ascertain the character of the widows she clothed,—though she was quite ready to admit it might be very useful, and get something out of those people who can't do good in a natural way. But she kept silence till Mr. Marten said :——

"There is little danger of hot-headed zeal and ignorant excitement among a committee all chosen from a Church which admits none to its priesthood without an University training. I often think that it would be much better if nobody undertook any ministerial work without similar careful and refining preparation."

"Mr. Marten, what is refinement?" asked Ruth.

"Refinement is the approach to perfection," he answered, quite glibly.

"And when is an object nearest to perfection—when

it is fit for its purpose, or when it is too delicate for any use but one for which it will never be used?" she went on. "If the latter, is its attainment desirable? Shall we have all our linen refined into lace and our food into confectionery?"

Mr. Marten took no notice of the questions, but said, "Nobody can deny that the simplest work is done best by good tools in skilful hands."

"That is what I always maintain," Ruth assented, most cordially, "but yet I don't think you would like all our crossings to remain dirty till we got senior wranglers with carpet brooms to sweep them. And then the senior wrangler would die of neuralgia from the wet feet that are almost an enjoyment to Irish Dick with his shaving-bound besom. And we should kill off our senior wranglers faster then we could cultivate them, and yet the crossings would keep on getting dirty!"

"Then you think that anybody is fit for the highest work of God's service," said the young gentleman rather sarcastically.

"No, I don't," answered Ruth, "only the anybodys who have passed a creditable examination in that costly school where God is the chief teacher and life is the only lesson."

"I hope you don't forget that the poor—especially the men—are always supposed to prefer a 'real clergyman' to any mere Scripture-reader or City missionary," he observed.

"Of course they do," she said; "the mystery of distance is about you, and when you talk nonsense, it shoots harmless over their heads, but towards the latter, as their equals, they feel pretty much as gentlemen of your class feel towards you."

"And how is that, if I may presume to inquire?" he asked.

"If I may presume to say," Ruth returned, "it is, that your observations of the world and your comments upon it, would be worth a great deal more if you dropped them for a while, and put your heads and hands to two or three good chores of honest work."

"If we sow unto you spiritual things, is it such a great thing if we reap your carnal things?" asked Mr. Marten, mildly, feeling safe with St. Paul.

"No, indeed," replied Ruth; "but that brings forward another question, Do you sow unto us spiritual things? or do you only take it for granted? Remember that the Apostles were all practical men, who had been through the common ways of life before they began to teach others how to play their parts therein. It seems to me that we might as well expect flowers in summer without planting them in spring, as look for rational, practical advice, or sensible consolation from men who have never personally entered into the interests and struggles of ordinary humanity. Strange inconsistency, to require wisdom of those who are denied experience. We do get it sometimes, but, like a girl who keeps her good sense all through a boarding-school education, it is in spite of circumstances instead of assisted by them. It seems to me that it might be a step in the right direction if all our ministers of every denomination were required to spend the first five or ten years of their career in some art, trade, or profession, according to their station in life."

"Then you ignore the value of an University education," he said.

"No, I don't," she answered, "there are certain styles of thought and life with which you couldn't very well sympathise without an University education; but I say that when you make it a *sine quà non* with every minister, you ignore other styles of life and thought, to feel sympathy with which, such a training, with all its belongings, is a hindrance rather than a help."

"But, Ruth, what a loss of time your plan would involve!" I ventured to observe.

"Do you infer that Christ lost his time when He was in the carpenter's shop?" I asked. "That is a part of his life on which I wish our teachers would reflect a little more. It seems to me that if anybody won't waste his time learning how to do anything properly, he has to waste double as much in undoing it, and spoils his material into the bargain!"

"I suppose it is my sympathies as a Church of England clergyman," said Mr. Marten, "but these lay Dissenting preachers give me the horrors, with their strong language and coarse vulgar illustrations. I remember I once heard one man compare God's mysterious providences to a Kidderminster carpet. In this world, we saw it on the wrong side, all confusion and ends; 'over Jordan,' he said, we should see the right side and the beautiful pattern. And another said life was like a Sheffiel dworkshop, joys and sorrows and troubles all hammering away together as if it was just a 'wild rout,' but if he went into the Master's warehouse, the fine cutlery there would show us there was a purpose in it all."

"Well," said Ruth, "illustrations are only meant to bring truth home to the hearers, not to display the artistic capabilities of the preacher. Those illustrations

might have been out of place before a fashionable congregation in a cathedral town, but as the greater should include the less, they would not have been so *mal-à-propos* there as a bishop's delicate metaphors of mountain scenery and high art would be if delivered in a manufacturing village in the flat, prosaic midlands. The truth is, Mr. Marten, I think there is no sermon worth a brave plain fact, and that a few very simple words spoken by a man whose life is among the people he addresses, and whom they see to keep righteous and untainted through the trials and temptations which endanger themselves, is worth the finest discourse of a 'parson' whose thrusts they can parry, with the awkward fact that 'he don't know nothing about it.' If we only knew dainty white hot-house flowers, we should think such purity to be impossible except in such a shelter, but when we see the snowdrop peeping up out of the brown winter ruin, we know better. All the time we have been talking, I have had in my mind's eye a good old man who holds cottage services about six miles from here. He was a 'scarecrow' boy in his young days, being left a friendless orphan, with every excuse to become a public nuisance in some jail or workhouse, but he is now in humble retirement on the small savings of a laborious and respected life, so that he has fairly earned his only coveted luxury, as he says, of leisure 'to work straight for his master.' I should like you to hear him."

The end of it was, that last night we three took a drive to the old preacher's house. Mr. Marten had his top-coat buttoned over his clerical waistcoat and tie. He thought he was doing something decidedly eccentric and

improper, and I am afraid he enjoyed the sensation and the idea of disguise!

The service was held in a large, low chamber, with coarse pottery on the mantel, and a few black profiles and gay Scripture prints hung irregularly over the rough walls. The audience were ranged in rows on rude benches, and every face was hard-working and care-worn, except that of a tall, fair-haired young man, whom I knew to be the son of the richest manufacturer in the county, but who was evidently too familiar with such primitive scenes to notice the ludicrous in the tuneless fiddle that led the hymn, or in the good housewife's anxious glance towards her saucepan when it threatened to boil over in the middle of the prayer. It was a story in the neighbourhood that this youth had been "converted" by my good friend, the venerable preacher, who stood behind the kitchen table, which supported his family Bible, with his thin grey hair shading a complexion like a healthy apple when we take it from the store basket about Christmas time. It was said that about two years back the young gentleman had taken a long ride to "enjoy the fun" of the old man's reported eccentricity, but that he rode back in the darkness not the same youth that had come that way in the earlier twilight. Some people whispered the history with much such stupefied superstition as they might have recounted the potent virtues of a mysterious charm. Others told it with incredulous scorn. Now I think people may puzzle themselves for ever over instantaneous conversion. I wish we could find some other words to express the meaning. These words are good words, but they have been pulled out of shape, and worn threadbare in

wrong uses. The matter is simple enough when we feel it. And until then it has nothing to do with us. I believe that all conversion is instantaneous, like sunshine. The sunshine may come to some before they notice its absence, and they have to look back and remember to know how dreary it was without it, while others feel there is something wanting in the beauty of life, and sit down in the rain and watch the storm clouds, and watch, and watch, and see the golden light brighten and fade and brighten again. But it bursts out suddenly at last—just when it will! You can't get it up at an appointed time, like fireworks. When we have had a godly upbringing, few but ourselves are likely to know when it takes place, any more than one can tell the precise moment when the buried seed begins to fructify. And if it comes to us while we are very young we may not understand what it is, and may not mark it until it has attained a goodly growth. And what is it? Well, it is not a ceasing from sin. Criminals we may never have been, and sinners we shall continue to be as long as we live. It is not an "interest in religion" (another threadbare phrase), for most decent children have serious thoughts, and feel uneasy when they stay from church, or forget to read their texts. I think it can't be better defined than as a revelation that Christianity is not in church-going and Bible-reading, but in a way of life which we can't live in our own strength, but for which divine worship and Scripture study teach us where to find help. We suddenly see that we have mistaken the producing machinery for the product itself, and comprehend that holiness does not so much lead us to do anything different from many other

people, but only to do the same things in a different spirit.

Old Robert Orme, the preacher, is one of those genial men who make no secret of their history or inner experience, thinking it is the corner of God's providence which God intended for their especial study. So whenever any episode of his life can point a text, or serve in encouragement or warning, he would think it a sin to withhold it. The incidents may be homely, but that only brings them nearer to his homely hearers, and his own heartfelt conviction of God's personal love and care must save many a poor soul from the dreary and demoralising feeling of being lost in a crowd, unnoticed by a Being who cannot possibly take an individual interest in anybody lower than a lord of a manor.

It happened that yesterday was his seventieth birthday. And he took for his text the last clause of the fifteenth verse of the forty-eighth chapter of Genesis: "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day." There was nobody there, except perhaps myself and Mr. Marten, who did not know the leading facts of his life, but as Robert Orme said, "a garrulous old body likes to talk it all over to his children, and I havn't any children except all of you." And so he began, telling how his father had been the son of a small Northumbrian farmer, and might have filled a respectable position in society, but being wild and reckless, and perhaps something worse, had sunk lower and lower, until a month before his boy's birth he died in a debtor's prison—surely penitent enough, Robert added simply, "for my mother always taught me that both my fathers were in heaven. I should know my mother if she stood here now," Robert

went on, "though she died when I was only six years old. She had hard work to keep herself and me, and I suppose she died of trying to do her duty, which is the best chariot a body can have to go to heaven in. I remember when there wasn't much bread in the cupboard, she would say she didn't want any, and would go on working while I ate it all up. I was only a little chap, and hadn't much sense, and I used to think what a good thing it was mother was never hungry except when there was plenty. Ah, I didn't understand women in those days! I don't say I understand them now. I should be an uncommon clever man if I did. But now I understand enough to know that I'm not up to them. And its aye something to know there is something beyond us. That man must have a poor idea of the ocean who would think he could measure it in his own little drinking-cup. We are never higher than when we see there's something above us. When you're in a hill-country, while you're in the valley, you don't think there's much difference in the heights round you, but directly you go up one you'll find out the hill that is highest. My mother taught me what a parent's love is, and when I heard God's love was greater still, that meant something indeed.

"I remember when she died," he continued. "She died in the early morning, and the woman who was nursing her, when she saw she was going, took me out of my little bed, and carried me to her for a last kiss. I did not understand all I was losing, else, maybe, I should not have taken such a clear notice of what happened. I heard the nurse tell afterwards that she could not hear what Mrs. Orme muttered when she saw her

little boy. But I heard, and so did God. She said, 'I'm leaving my darling with you, my Father. Nobody beside. But Thou art enough. In Thee is all else. What I give Thee, Thou wilt not lose. Whatever he may want, Thou canst supply.' Ah," the old man used to add, the tears standing on his ruddy cheeks, "often and often, when God has sent me good things that I never dreamed of asking, I've thought,—that's all through mother's prayer, 'Whatever he may want.' Does anybody say my mother left me unprovided for? I say no. The legacy of that prayer was a richer fortune than thousands in the Bank of England without it. You can't provide for your child by any other means in the world. You may leave it money, and land, and guardians. And banks may break, and law-suits fail, and Death remove, and dishonesty corrupt, till your child may have nothing left, but the disheartening feeling of loss. Or if things prosper, and your child comes into his fine fortune, then you can't prevent him running through it, and melting away your gold into an easy slide down to hell. But if you put your child into God's hands, whether or no there is anything else to put with it, He'll manage it all for the best. It's a grand thing that prayer will keep hold of a body anywhere. A boy may run away from home and lose himself in the Australian bush, or the American gold-fields, or a girl may float off in that terrible tide that rushes through our great cities, but they can't get away from their old mother while she kneels down at her bedside and puts the Lord in mind of all his precious promises. Prayer joins mortal love with divine strength.

"My mother was buried two days after her death, and the day after the funeral, the bits of furniture were given

up to pay the last fortnight's rent. That was all that was owing, and the things fairly made up the difference, so nobody was any worse for trusting mother. Our landlord had a brother in the country fifty miles away, who could find a use for a little chap like me, scaring birds and such like. So I was sent off. And my look round our little room, with mother's workbox still standing on the table, was the last I had of any home, till I was six-and-twenty, when the Lord put me in the way of a little lassie who was willing to help me to make a home for myself."

Robert Orme did not say much about those twenty lonely years of his life. We caught glimpses of them now and then, as when he told us how, when ten years old, at a fair, he had a mental conflict whether he should buy a new cap or a Pilgrim's Progress. "If I'd had my mother with me," he said, "she'd have advised for the book. It was advice I wanted. So God made up my mind for me, and I bought Bunyan. It was wonderful in what a many ways Bunyan was useful to me. There was such a grand differ between the manner of his book, and the trashy books the other farmer-lads had, that I lost all patience with them and never read another. Then the characters were all real living beings to me, and I couldn't help measuring them with the people round me. Mercy was my favorite. And I couldn't fancy Mercy going about in washed-out flounces, and tawdry fid-fads of coloured glass and rusty gilt like most of the girls in the factory near-hand. When I was fifteen I saw a girl that I thought must look like her. She had on a sensible merino frock, and a bit of green ribbon in her bonnet, and her face was like a pink-tipped daisy. I'd got into

a many slovenly ways by that time, only likely, maybe, with no mother to look after me. But God, he was looking after me. D'ye think slovenly ways are beneath his notice? I wonder how many the devil has got hold of, because they would not take the trouble to wash their hands. And so God led me to notice that little lass, and, natural enough, I felt I'd no right to look at such as her unless I made myself spruce and clean; and when I was spruce and clean, the rougher sort of boys didn't want anything to do with me, save, maybe, to take a sight at me round the corner! And that left me plenty more time to read my two or three books, and potter about in my bit of garden, and I reared one or two flowers that took the notice of the squire's gardener, and he used to let me into his greenhouses, and put me up to a thing or two, till it came into my mind I'd better be a gardener than an agricultural laborer. He got me an under-place, and I was very well satisfied, and moved into decenter lodgings in a house in the same row with the bonnie little lass, and from constantly passing each other as we came in and out, at last we got as far as to say 'good morning;'—on the strength of which, at young squire's coming of age when I was eighteen, I downright made up to her, and sat next her at the feast they gave us on the lawn. But the very next week after that, she went on a visit to an aunt of hers in Nottingham, and there she got the offer of a good situation, and so she stopped. That was the first trouble of my life. It may seem a little thing looking back on't, and I and my wife often laugh over it, but it's wonderful what a deal of joy or sorrow may be in a little thing. A very little pea in your shoe will give you precious uneasy walking. It was like a stab to go home

at night, and know that, however long I might hang about at the gate, there'd be no pretty little girl coming down the lane, with a pleasant word for a body. There were plenty other lasses, and I'll not deny some of them were pretty and good and pleasant enough, but the more they were like my Bessie, the harder it seemed that she wasn't there herself. Presently Bessie's friends moved away, and I lost all word of her. I made up my mind that she'd marry in Nottingham. Not knowing much of the world then, I thought it wasn't likely a dear little woman like that would be left single. And so I just went on with my gardening, and got a better place, and put by a bit of money. There were plenty temptations for me, and it was miserable enough knocking about in lodgings. But God had known all about it, and many a time I thanked Him on my bended knee for that glimpse of Bessie, though I was such a fool that I never thought of asking Him to let me see her again. Was it because I thought He couldn't do it? Or did I think it wasn't worth His while? How it must grieve Him when we don't believe He is tender enough to be pitiful towards any of our wants!

"Well, I came to be six-and-twenty, and you may be quite sure I'd left off grieving after Bessie. Healthy people, with plenty to do, don't go fretting for years. I had not forgotten her. I'd never seen another I liked so well, and I made up my mind I'd live single till I did. I wouldn't marry in a makeshift, I'd seen enough of that. If a man marries for a housekeeper without wages, it's precious bad housekeeping he is likely to get. And serves him right!

"When I was six-and-twenty I took a holiday. A

mate of mine had taken a gardener's place at a fine hall about twenty miles away, and he was always writing about such wonders there, that I thought I'd go and see 'em. I asked three days' leave-of-absence, and got them. Dear me, I never shall forget how queer I felt to have all that time to myself in my Sunday clothes! I'd never felt such a feeling before, and if I'd known as much then as I know now, I should have known something was going to happen. Now, my friends, you needn't turn up your noses, and tell me you have no patience with fancies, and that the future is hid with God, and all that. I'm not denying it. God knows what the weather will be to-morrow, but if it is going to be a particularly fine day, you'll see the promise in the sunset, and I don't suppose there's an old woman among you who does not say sometimes, 'There's a storm brewing, I can feel the thunder in the air.' D'ye think it was blasphemy to make the lines—

'An evening red and a morning gray,
Are the sure signs of a bonnie day'

I think it's rather more blasphemy to refuse to use the senses God gave us. And as the shepherd is a fool who does not learn the signs in the sky, so I don't know any other name for the man who does not learn the signs in his own life. Don't be afraid of them. Don't make believe that you don't see them when you do. That won't keep them away. The weather-wise man don't have worse weather than any one else, and when he sees the clouds rising he gets out his overcoat and his umbrella. He may be in a bad case if he hasn't either, for he feels the storm both in fear and fact. But to say you'd rather not think about trouble till it comes, is as wise as to

prefer being drenched to the skin to carrying a cloak. All you have to do is to get close to your Refuge, and the warning before hand just gives you time to get back to it, if you've wandered a little away, as we're all likely to do. 'In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion ; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.'

"I'm ashamed to say I've always taken more notice of the grey sunsets than the rosy ones. If I'd felt there was joy coming to me that June morning, I'd have been half afraid to believe it. Ah, friends, we have no need to look far for the curse that father Adam brought upon us. Just take up your nearest blessing, and you'll see it plainest there, as a black smut shows worst on a white dress. We're afraid of our very happiness, and not needlessly, for there isn't a crown in this world that hasn't a cross made up into it somehow. But we are not to refuse the crown to escape the cross. If we try to do that, we shall get the cross without the crown. And now, friends, let me tell you an old gardener's secret. When you look upon the green blessings that God has planted round you, don't you jump to the conclusion that every bit of brown is blight. I remember when I was quite a young man, my mistress sent for me into the drawing-room, and there she was, standing by her fern-case. 'And oh, gardener,' says she, 'what shall I do? Here is my beautiful Royal fern that my cousin brought me from Killarney all withering down.' I looked at it, and true enough, it was all brown and crumpled. 'But it's not dead, ma'am,' says I. 'Dear me, isn't it?' she said. 'It looks uncommonly like it. It spoils the looks of all the rest. Can't we just take away that faded frond, gar-

dener?' 'Of course, we can do whatever you like, ma'am,' says I, 'but what you call blight is the fertility of the fern.' And my lady put up with the brown-looking thing after that. And it's the same with you, friends. If you understood your blessings as God does, you'd know that what you call blight is more like blossom. The dying down on earth is the dropping of seed for heaven. Let us take the bit of brown among the green, and thank God for all.

"Well, I've wandered far away from my June holiday in my Sunday clothes. I hope I've not tired you out. Some folks say that in travelling or telling a story, or most things, one should go on straight and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. I think it depends upon circumstances. If everybody did that, I wonder who'd find the beautiful mosses and precious wee plants that God hides away in shady corners, as a loving father tucks the new toy under the sofa cushion to give his children the pleasure of finding it out?

"It was a weary, long journey before I reached my mate, and I was as tired and hot and flustered as possible, and he saw plain enough that I had no eyes for any of his fine shows until I had taken some dinner and a rest. After that I went over the place with him. The family was away, and my friend seemed in good favour with everybody, for when the housekeeper saw us talking to the head-gardener she came out, and said we might come in and have a look through the rooms, and wonderful fine rooms they were, and I was sorry to hear that the young lord was a poor ailing creature that the climate didn't suit, so that he lived chiefly in lodgings over in some Popish part. And after we had been

through, a responsible-looking, middle-aged woman came to us, and said there was tea for us in the kitchen. I'd never been in a lord's house before, and I knew my old master wouldn't have liked his servants asking company. So I said something about that. And didn't she laugh. 'We shouldn't give two thoughts about setting a chair for any of our people's friends,' she said. 'My lord would think the credit of the old house was gone if we didn't. There's enough and to spare, thank God; but if there wasn't, our hospitality would be the last thing to feel the pinch.' So we went into the kitchen, which was a finer place than I'd ever seen before that day. And we sat down to table, quite a party it seemed, but presently I heard it wasn't everybody, for one of the young women said she was afraid 'Bessie wouldn't get back till the tea was cold.'

"There's plenty of Bessies in the world. I knew six in our old village. But when I heard of this Bessie, I was quite sure she was my Bessie. I remember I spilt my tea and made stupid company, and, when it was over, my mate couldn't think why I kept on sitting. I was not going to stir till I'd seen Bessie. She didn't come in till it was quite twilight, and I knew her step afore she came, and actually she'd still got a bit of green ribbon on her bonnet! She had a basketful of something, and she began emptying it, and talking to the cook, never looking at our corner, till I jumped up and said, 'Miss, I think us two have met before, long ago. Don't you mind Bob Orme?' And then she gave a startled little cry, with a sort of sound in it as if she'd thought about Bob Orme once or twice since she had seen him, and wasn't altogether sorry to see him again!

And wasn't there a laugh through the kitchen. And, says my mate as we two walked back to his lodgings, says he, 'Bob, I did think it was un-common kind of you to come all this way for to see me and the gim-cracks.' And nothing I might say ever persuaded any of them to believe that I didn't know Bessie was there before I came.

"When I left at the end of my three days' holiday, Bessie and I had come to the conclusion we would never lose sight of each other again. I remember one evening we had a talk about meeting in heaven. It was brought about by speaking of the many nice good people we had just come across, and then been parted from. Bessie was saying that the more good people one just saw, the greater longing one had for the place where they will all gather together, and never be separated. 'But it puzzles me how we shall find each other out,' said Bessie; 'see how we two have missed each other in a few thousands of people just twenty miles apart, and then think what a large place the world is, and what a long time it has been going on, and heaven has been filling all that while!'

"'I'll tell you what, Bessie,' said I, 'we needn't think about it, for God has the management of it all. And if you and I have been parted, Bessie, haven't we met again? And then nobody will be a stranger in heaven, Bessie. We shall love every face the moment we see it. And depend on it, we shall find out the old faces somehow. A little silly child loses itself within sight of its home, but a grown man finds out his birthplace though he has been twenty years abroad, and everything is quite different to when he went away. So our souls will grow equal to heaven, Bessie, and then it won't be

larger to us than our town is now, which we think a large place, while Londoners call it a mere village. We need not fret about anything in heaven, lassie. God has told us that we shall be satisfied, and isn't that enough?'

"Bessie and I were married at the New Year. She would have been quite happy to have gone on living in the old town. If a woman frets after more furniture or finer clothes, you young men may just make up your minds she does not love you, for if she do, she'll stand out that whatever you can give her is just what she wants, and that there's nothing else in the world she'd care to have. But you mustn't be gammoned that way. The better pleased she is with the cotton gown you bring her, the more reason that you should try to make it a silk one next time. So I took my little bit of money out of the bank, and bought a small florist's business near London, and there we went and lived. 'Twasn't all brightness. The farmer would get poor crops if it was always sunshine. We had three little boys, one after the other, and the longest the Lord could spare any of them was six years. Folks used to say that my wife and me loved 'em too much. That's devil's doctrine. Our hearts are far too shallow to grow too much love for anything. We can't love our darlings too much, but the harm is we may love them more than God. That isn't loving them too well, it is loving them the wrong way. I don't know if we did that—we didn't mean to. I'm not one of those who thinks that every sorrow must come to punish us for something. I don't find that in the Bible. The rain comes because the grass wouldn't grow without it, yet we never say it comes in punishment.

"I've got my mother's prayer down in God's book on my behalf, and I have a little lad's prayer there as well. When my boy that lived the longest was just five years old, I was taken like to die. It was the first illness I had ever had, and in those cases it is often first and last too. Well, the doctor gave me up, and I gave myself up too. It seemed very hard to leave Bessie and the little ones, but I can't say it seemed hard to die. You know when you look at any dark place, it seems very black, but if you're in it, there's generally some light. And I had stepped far enough into the dark valley to see that there's some starlight gets down into it. And so I lay on my bed, and felt there was nothing for me to do but wait. And I almost fancied I could remember when I had lain as helpless in my cradle waiting for my mother. And as I lay I heard little feet going up the stairs, poor little heavy feet they were, for my boy was always weak on his legs, and I could hear his hand catching the banister rails to help him on. And then I heard the door in the room above me, and then a bump on the ceiling. The house was so quiet, I could hear my child praying—'Our Father, mother says that you are going to send for daddy. Please don't send for him yet. Let daddy live to be an old man, our Father.' And then I heard my boy picking himself up by his hands and knees, and he came toddling down to my bedroom, and put his head round the door, and asked, 'Daddy, aren't you better?' And somehow I did feel better that very minute; and the next time the doctor came he said I had taken a turn. My little one did not pray as many of us do, as if he didn't expect to be heard, or as if he knew beforehand that God's will was against him, and just muttered over

a form as a sort of civility. And I shouldn't wonder that my glimpse of his faith was a genuine tonic for me. Faith can't be idle; it works out its own vitality. Christ said that whoever had a grain of it might move mountains. Depend on it he would take a shovel and spade, and dig away, and get as many as he could to help him. And that brings me to another point, my friends. Our faith is not of ourselves; it is God's gift. We should ask about that first; for when we feel it strong in our souls, it is the shadow of his coming answer. Only shadows can't fall on darkness. So if we let our heart get black with care and despondency, faith can't enter; and when God proves Himself more kind than our fears have painted Him, then we get the blessing, but we lose the pleasure of expecting. Don't you remember the story of Peter in prison, and how 'prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him;' and how the angel came to Peter while he was sleeping—yes, sleeping, my friends. He had made up his mind he was to lose his head next day, but still he was sleeping. Peter was a married man, and perhaps he had some little lads and lasses, but he was not lying awake fretting about them. And as for the loss of his own head, he knew there was about as much in that as if his old coat was to be torn in two. Peter knew what many of us don't seem to believe, that our life only uses our body as a garment, and that a spirit can do as well without a head as with one. Well, then the angel came and woke him, and took him to his friend's house, and they wouldn't believe it was him—they wouldn't believe they had got what they had been asking for! And that is like a good deal of our faith, brethren.

"And sometimes when we think we have faith, it isn't faith in God, it is faith in our banker's book or our breeches' pocket. I've often had that sort of faith. I've thought I trusted God, because I knew there was plenty of money in the till, and I've found out my mistake, because a bit of faith went off with every shilling, till there was none left at all. But do you know, I think God himself empties us of our faith sometimes. You see every good thing that gets into our hearts is like clear water poured into a dirty basin, after it stands a little while it gets fouled and cloudy—a sediment of self-righteousness at the bottom and muck of indolence at the top. And when God sees that, He turns the stop-cock, and drains it all out, and maybe uses some very sharp tools to put the reservoir into better repair. Then we can't help being miserable, but we ought to be as contented to bear the misery as we are to bear the pain which we pay the dentist to give us, that we may get rid of a useless tooth. When we are grown up, we don't cry when we take physic, because we know it will do us good; but in spiritual matters many of us keep like foolish children to the very last, and never seem to understand that the sharpest pain may mean the surest cure.

"Anybody who has been into the depths of despair, and has felt God's hand reach him in the dark there and draw him up, will never wish that he had not gone down. I am only a poor, unlearned man, and it wouldn't have taken much to help me out of any of my troubles, except when the babies died. But we know that people may die of starvation in great cities, and food wasting in the very house next door. It is only God who can bring the want and the supply together. And that is what His mercy

generally does. 'Oh, but,' I've heard folks say, 'I don't see how my matters can mend, and I can't expect God to work miracles for me.' My friend, you must not fancy miracles are God's feats. It is much more wonderful that He makes the sun to rise and set at its appointed time, than that He once stopped it for a while upon Gibeon. It is much more wonderful that He generally provides for you without those special providences that we call miracles, than that He occasionally lets the wheel of circumstance run into so bad a rut, that it can't go on again without such a jilt as shakes up all your faith and gratitude. And yet, my friends, I know that we can't remember the miles and miles of straight and easy driving as well as we do the crooked corner where we almost got a spill.

"I can tell you the story of the blackest days in my life. We were living up Highbury way. It was winter time, and business was bad, and Bessie was ill, and so was the boy, and it was no money coming in, and all money going out, as long as there was any to go—which wasn't long. There were good jobs of work going forward in the neighborhood, but I was quite a stranger, and they all went past me. It came to the worst one Saturday. I woke up that morning with only a few shillings in the world, but directly after breakfast in came the plumber who had been doing something to my stove. And he had brought his bill. I remember the amount well enough. It is not likely I should ever forget it. It was seven and fourpence. And it would leave me exactly eightpence. He had only done the job on Monday, and I had hoped to get a little grace. Just as I was going to say so, he began, neighbor-like, to tell how hard-

up he was, and how it was very fine to work as he did, and yet have his honestly earned money shut up in other people's tills, while his children almost wanted bread. I knew he was saying so to me, not thinking it a bit personal, for up to that time the cash had always been ready the minute he wanted it, debt being something I mortally fear. (You may flounder out of almost any pond of difficulty unless you tie that millstone round your neck.) After that I could not ask him to wait even until Monday, and if I had, I could no more have changed that seven and fourpence than I could have put my hand plump into his pocket. To keep another in his difficulties could not be God's way of helping me out of mine. So I paid him. And then I went into the little place behind my shop, and knelt down besides the stove with no fire in it. I can't say I prayed. I only thought it all over —as Hezekiah spread out Sennacherib's letter—before the Lord. And it came into my mind that there were two little accounts due to me. Both together wouldn't make up what I had paid the plumber, and they had been owing a long time from shuffling sort of people, so that while I had anything better to do, I shouldn't have felt justified in throwing away my time to look after them. But it was a sort of forlorn hope now, and I thought from it coming into my head that way, it was, maybe, the Lord's will I should get them. Both the parties lived at Bermondsey, and I walked to London Bridge and took the train there. The first place I went to the landlady was very sour to me, and said that it was hard she should be fagged off her legs answering the duns of a man that had gone away leaving rent unpaid, and no effects but a great trunk full of stones. I was sure it

was hard enough, and I said I was sorry, and begged her pardon and went on to the next. I was not very sure of the way, and it was among new streets without even kerbstones put down, and with no names at the corners, but I found it at last, and I stood, knocking and ringing for fully half an hour, but nobody answered, and a little girl from next door told me there was nobody at home. There was nothing for me but to go back to the station and get into the train again. O, but it was hard, hard! I'd thrown away the money that might have bought us at least a loaf for to-morrow, but even that wasn't so bitter as the feeling that what I'd thought was the Lord's guiding was only a will-o'-the-wisp. And I never did see such a lot of miserable people as I saw that day. It may be hard to see flaunting enjoyment when you're down in the world, but it's dreadful disheartening to see wretchedness heaped on wretchedness, as if the whole world was slipping down and you were sinking with it. Well, I got into a third-class carriage that was empty, for if there's a time when trouble drives one among one's fellows, there's another time when it drives one away by oneself. In those days third-class carriages hadn't glazed windows, but were just open at the sides like some of the cheap excursion trains now. I sat down in the corner, and laid my head on the sill, and I said, 'Are you going to destroy me, Father? Do you mean us to die of hunger? O Father, the hunger is very near now, and you know what you mean to do with us, but we don't know, and it is so hard! O Father, the wife and the little one!'

"The train was jolting along very roughly, and such a strong blast blew suddenly through the carriage that I

drew in my head, and turned round. And then I saw I wasn't by myself after all. There was somebody sitting close beside me. A man. I'm not ashamed now to say that I was crying, but then I had that sort of touchy feeling that if anybody saw my tears it would make me hate 'em. So I turned back, and popped my head out again, and when the train stopped at the bridge, out I jumped, and never looked around. It had come on a regular stormy evening, and the snow beat strong in my face all the way up Cannon Street, which I think, at the best of times, isn't a comforting street for a needy body, it seems so grand and Lord Mayorish—as if there was no business worth doing under a thousand pounds' profit. On I went, stupefied like, and presently I just thrust my hands into my pockets to keep them out of the cold and wet. My left hand took hold of something hard. What a jump my heart gave! it felt so like a shilling, but then I knew it couldn't be, for shillings had not been so plentiful for a long time that any was likely to be forgotten. I took it out and held it up to a colored light in a chemist's shop. It was a shilling! And I put my hand back into my pocket, and pulled out another—and another—and another until there were nine of them! I couldn't believe it. I stamped on the pavement to wake myself out of a dream that would make the reality crueller than ever, but I only hurt my feet for my pains, for my boots were not over-good. It wasn't a dream. And it was the Lord who had put it into my mind to go to Bermondsey, although the help didn't come in the way that I expected. Ah, my friends, I have an idea that in heaven there will be some way to find out that stranger in the train!

"That was the last time I was ever in bitter trouble of that sort. The very next Tuesday a very odd old gentleman that lived not far from my place came into my shop, and gave me a good order. I can't think what put it into his head, for he knew nothing about me, and was reputed close and queer in money matters, and certainly wasn't any flower-fancier, for he had lived in his house thirty years, and I'm sure nothing but weeds had grown in his garden till he sent for me that Tuesday morning. I've sometimes thought perhaps it was him who saw me in my doldrums in the train, and Bessie made up her mind that it was, and would tell him the whole story, as she said, 'to see how he looked,' but he had one of those funny old faces that you may take anyhow you like. However, from that time, I was never quite out of work, and gradually I got on, and became well-to-do in my little way, and the better the business grew the more I wished I might keep my boy, as I began to see my way clear to make life pretty easy even to a poor little ailing fellow like him. It do seem strange that one left as I had been should weather everything, and another petted and sheltered should have the frost at its very roots. You'll often see it so with plants. Well, the Lord did not take him away suddenly. He let me have plenty of time to fit my mind to His will. Of course, we know that all troubles come out of God's permission, like all temptations, but then He lets some of them come that we may struggle with them and rise above them. And while human nature is human nature it will always be one thing to lose your sweetheart because some showy dandy cuts you out, or your business because somebody over the way undersells you, and

quite another thing when the silent angel comes softly in, and as he opens his wings to fold away your darling, fills the house with the sweet air that gets about him as he passes in and out of heaven. There's no denying that there's a solemn peace with death. I think it is because we feel the enemy has done his worst, and our Father has made it our best. I am sure that when Bessie and I sat hand in hand on the night of our boy's funeral we felt that we had never loved him so well, nor each other more, nor God as much, as we did then.

"And so my life has passed on, and now I know it cannot be very long before the neighbours will say to each other, 'Old Robert Orme has gone.' I think you all know me too well to think that I'm a conceited body to have said so much about myself, though a stranger once hinted as much after I'd been telling one or two of these same anecdotes. Dearie me, it only pleases me 'to make my boast in the Lord,' and to bring up how good He has always been to me, as worthless as I am. There'll be one or two of you pitiful enough to say I've not been quite worthless to you ; and, indeed, a man must be in a bad way who hasn't one kind voice to say as much for him. But I'm not what I might have been, friends, and it's awful to feel how little I've done that I might have done. There's an awful depth in the confession, 'We have left undone those things we ought to have done.' We don't know half its meaning ; but God does. And yet He'll own us for his children. It's a solemn thing to be wrapped in such a cloak of undeserved love. What must it be when we force ourselves out of it, hard as it is to be so? Rather let us wrap ourselves in it, brethren ; let us fold it round and round

us till we lose ourselves in it, and never remember ourselves again till we hear our name called from that heavenly roll-book which Jesus has written with his blood!"

"If he had only been educated!" said Mr Marten, as we came out.

"He'll do as he is," Ruth returned, and then we all paid him the compliment of silence.

IV.

A HAPPY WOMAN.

LYDIA HOWEL was one of the happiest women I ever knew. She was about ten years younger than me. Her father was the only builder in both Mallowes, and was supposed to have a respectable fortune, for they lived in one of those old-fashioned red-brick houses with paved court-yards and iron gates, which give a certain distinction to one end of the High Street. She herself was thought the prettiest child in the place, an opinion endorsed by the notice bestowed on her by old Miss Capel, whose father had been a major-general, and who we understood had once peeped between the barriers of social circles before whose glories the lights of the Manor and the Clockhouse waned very dim and pale. Miss Capel bestowed her old court pearls on Lydia Howel, the builder's daughter, and sorely perplexed Mrs. Howel by a further present of a "brocade sack," which had been worn only once, fifty years before, at a grand rout given by the Marchioness of Somewhere, and which would "cut down" beautifully for the "rising belle."

"It cost its price when it was new, it tells that story till to-day," confided chatty, genial Mrs. Howel; "and I'm sure it's very kind of Miss Capel to think of Lydia, and I shouldn't value it a bit the less if I laid it aside in a drawer along with Howel's mother's sable tippet, that

I'm always afraid the moths will get at. But Miss Capel wouldn't understand that. And I must say I can't bear second-hand fineries, neither the look nor the ideas of 'em. And I don't see any honour in its being worn at the Marchioness's party, and I wonder that Miss Capel should mention it, for she was telling some queer stories about that very lady only last week, and I made bold to say I should be sorry to have been on speaking terms with such a character, and it's Miss Capel's fault if she made her out worse than she was. But I'm sure one of those checked silks the draper is selling at half-a-crown a yard would become our Lydia a deal better. But a present is a present, and if you slight one that don't suit you, you may live to want one that does."

Lydia was the only child in the Howel's old-fashioned substantial home. A thorough home it was, bearing the stamp of years of affluence and comfort, which is something that mere wealth cannot buy just when it pleases. No bran-new terrace with Grecian nymphs on its pedestals could impress one like the old half-circular flight of steps, considerably worn in the middle, and flanked by the two ugly stone lions, who looked but fiercer and more dauntless under the havoc which time and storms had wrought upon their features. Not that the old house had any aristocratic associations. It was built late in the seventeenth century by a Dutch merchant, one of those worthy workers who slowly made honest wealth, so that their characters formed with their fortune, and the man never commanded less respect than his money. From his family it passed to the Howels, and thus in nearly a century and a half it had known but two house-

holds. Nor did it ape anything above its owner's degree. The men who built and kept it had unconsciously wrought into it their own independent honesty. No conservative oak or distinguished cedar screened it from the public way, but just two sturdy plebian elms, spreading out bountiful branches, under shade of which Owen Howel's workmen were wont to lounge while they waited for their weekly wage. Double doors had the old house, and the outer one stood always open to give free ingress to the front room on the right, whose tall narrow windows were shaded by short wire blinds, announcing "Owen Howel, Builder," surmounted with some masonic hieroglyphic. The Dutch merchant had fitted it up as a counting-house, and it had always kept its original name and use. The room on the left was the common family apartment, and despite its hospitable table and snug settees, it never bore any more imposing name than "the parlour," just as the great chamber above, stretching the whole width of the house, was simply "the tea-room."

Owen Howel himself was a great genial man, with large rough-cut features, that seemed only to want a little more chiselling to be handsome. But for his unmistakable name, one could never have suspected his Welsh descent. He had neither the Cambrian superiorities nor defects. I think I should have taken him for a native of the north, with possibilities of an Irish cross in his pedigree. He had passed the conventional time (or a little less) at Hopleigh Grammar School, and had got just that amount of learning which might be expected in a boy not especially industrious, but full of animal life, and not much disturbed by paternal surveillance. But

if there was an occasional flaw in the grammar or even the orthography of Owen Howel's contracts, there was never a hole in their performance. He had chosen a congenial wife—a buxom hearty dame, at whose book-learning a modern National-school child would scoff, but who managed her house like the wise women at the end of the Proverbs, and by kitchen cookery and sound unsparing advice had reprieved more than one neighbour from death and the doctor's prophecies. It was always a treat to take tea with the Howels. Without being greedy of good things, there is a comfortable sense of hospitality in their liberal presence. The table might not be *recherché*, and I don't suppose Mrs. Howel even knew that fashion interfered in such arrangements, but generosity and good-will can never be vulgar, and I must say I am primitive enough to prefer an abundant supply of honest English fruit on a stone-china plate to three diminutive clusters of foreign grapes and a pair of plated scissors, in a frosted glass dish, on the top of a silver palm-tree, and everybody afraid to help himself for fear there will be nothing left for anybody else. And if Mrs. Howel ever discovered a guest's particular taste, she was sure to remember it. Was it because she was an inferior woman with no mind above her cooking range? Well, I once heard a young Scotchman say that he was just beginning to think certain gay new English friends much wiser than the old folks at home, and was almost subscribing to their views of Sunday non-observance and week-night ir-rational amusement, when the sight of Mrs. Howel's scones, made in compliment to his nationality, touched a queer little chord in his heart, which set the old home tune agoing again. Go on with

your mathematics and your algebra, my superior young female friends with the not very pretty faces, but it will be a long time before your cubes and your triangles will bring you to a triumph like that!

Amid the brown homeliness of the house and the household, little Lydia Howel bloomed like an apple blossom on a rough old tree. I am sure she had a very happy childhood, and that the sympathy occasionally bestowed upon her isolation by the mothers of crowded, scrambling, unindividualised families was quite wasted. Her father and mother were children in the ideal sense of childhood, for they were both unworldly and unworn. I often thought the whole village could give no prettier picture of domestic life, than Lydia seated on the window-sill of the parlour giving her mother real interest and delight by reading aloud from a story-book. Mrs. Howel was a sincere listener, who laughed and cried at the right places, and never needed a *resumé* of last night's reading, nor interrupted a hero's death-bed scene, with an "I beg your pardon, my dear, but there's the butcher's wife gone by with another new bonnet—her third this summer! No wonder we have to pay for our meat!" Mrs. Howel believed in books. For her the story was true and the characters real. "If it's not a fact, it ought to be," I have heard her say, in defence of her enthusiasm over some pathetic incident, "and I am one of those that believe that whatever ought to be, is."

Then a little later in the evening, strollers in the High Street might often hear Owen Howel and his daughter singing together. Their voices might be rather unequally matched, and Mr. Howel blundered sometimes, but I pity anybody whose tastes are so fine that any such

superficial deficiency blinds them to the very soul of beauty and harmony. But then I am not musical. The song which touched me most in all my life, was not that which I heard a great prima donna sing at a festival in the county town. No ; I heard it by the fire-light in a small shabby room, a young widow sitting at an old cracked piano, sadly singing a gay air she had sung in the days of her love and happiness. It was to please the dead husband's doited mother, who sometimes fancied her boy was in the next room, and in the twilight used to ask for "Charlie's song." But, I repeat, I don't understand music. I can only make out that it is one form of emotional expression, and it seems to me that may sometimes be truest in a faltering note, or an utter break-down.

And Lydia Howel was such a good little girl. She had a small Sabbath class in an orphan school a little way out of the village, and I don't think she missed it one Sunday all the year round. She used to visit all the uninteresting, neglected people in the neighborhood, making herself look her best in her pretty bright fineries, and airing all her innocent mirth and gossip at the scanty tea-tables of soured women, who hated her for her very efforts to please them, and would have been more cheered if she had come in sackcloth and ashes. "Very easy for her to be good," I have heard some of them say. "It would be more shame for her if she were not good, when all the world she lived in seemed made for her. She would not always have her father and mother to make a fool of her. Wait and see then!" That used to put me in mind of a certain individual who went up among the sons of God, and asked in cruel sarcasm, "Doth Job

fear God for nought?" Why can't people look at a good life that seems all happiness just as they look upon a rose, as something that brings beauty and gladness even to themselves? The world can't be so very, very bad, where such roses can bloom at all. But, alas! they certainly fade very quickly.

Some people—and they were generally those whose own sons gave them the least cause for thanksgiving—used to be always feeling for poor Mr. Howel, with that good business of his, and all his money, having only one child, and that a daughter. It just verified the truth that nobody could have everything. They could not think why Mr. Howel gave himself so much trouble, up at six in the morning and out among his men—for he must have a good bit of money already—quite as much as it would be wise to leave to a girl.

Now Owen Howel had had a younger brother, Llewellyn. Owen and Llewellyn had played together in Malowe High Street, and fought for each other on the green, but inside the grammar school Llewellyn had always been a class or two a-head of his elder brother. It was not his glory to scramble among the timber, and delight their father's workmen by pertinent questions, as was Owen's wont. And so Owen alone kept to the family business, and Llewellyn became a dissenting minister, and was appointed to a little chapel on the Welsh coast, near Conway. The two brothers never met again. Travelling cost considerable time and money in those days, and Owen was too busy and Llewellyn too poor for long journeys. They never saw each other's wives, but Mrs. Owen put on mourning and shed very sincere tears when Mrs. Llewellyn died. Nor, I think did they

correspond very frequently. The builder, at least, was scarcely a letter-writing man. So they cheerfully submitted to the necessity under which one ripened family circle splits into many. But there is a healthy affection which does not die in separation and silence. And when a second black-edged letter with the Conway post-mark came to Owen Howel, I daresay the good man and his wife lay awake that night, and talked over old times and whispered about the orphan boy in the far-away house by the moaning sea, and perhaps Owen remembered how Lewellyn had once written that his boy Tom was not over fond of learning, and did not want to be a parson, or anything of that sort. And then I daresay Owen said they must look after the lad. And then there would be a pause, till he would add that though the business was worth a great deal in itself, it wouldn't realize much for Lydia after all—and if this boy would take to it—well—surely Owen's daughter would not suffer in the welfare of Llewellyn's son—he had often wondered whether Llewellyn had his full share of everything. And then Mrs. Owen would suggest that the nephew had better come up and see them, it was dree to think of him in that lone house among the rocks, he would be catching rheumatic fever with unaired linen, or be starved with wretched cooking, or something awful. "Write and ask him to-morrow," I think she would say. And Mr. Owen wrote, and there would be plenty of kindness to peep through the stiff, formal phrases that would be sure to stick about his unaccustomed pen.

The nephew arrived, six feet high, and handsome and interesting in his black clothes. "He brought very little luggage," said the gossips; "depend on it, a fine young

fellow like that won't settle in any such dull place as Mallowe, whatever his uncle may wish. There are better prizes in the world than anything in the old Red House and the timber-yard." But before a week was out, he was seen with Mr. Howel, actively interested among the workmen, and then the sympathies which had been wasted on Lydia's sonless parents were suddenly transferred to herself, and a cry went round the Mallowe tea-tables that everybody could see how it was to be managed. Of course, the young man would be ready enough to step into his uncle's connexion with just the burden of the daughter, for, after all, Lydia was pretty and nice enough as girls go. And she, poor child, would have no voice in the matter. The poor, dear darling! To be sure, it might be called providing for her, and so it would be simply interest and convenience on all sides, if one could bring oneself to look on it in what might be called a sensible light. But feeling minds could not but wish such a sweet young creature some better fate than to be the mere make-weight in a bargain. Ah! spoilt children are often expected to suffer for their spoiling, like the innocent lambs that those ancient Greeks and Romans used to pamper and crown for the sacrifice. It was to be hoped that the youth's sense of duty would ensure kind treatment for the poor little darling; but, oh! it was a great risk! Thank God, their own dear girls had nothing to tempt any mercenary, and could be chosen only for their intrinsic merits which, to be sure, were worth more than any fortune.

Well, it did no harm to the Howels, who were not the sort of parents to realize that their daughter had become an interesting young lady in long dresses and glossy

braids. They were both blindly innocent to all peculiar significance in the new state of family affairs, rather too blindly innocent perhaps, only that Providence often helps such people to do very shrewd things without knowing it.

Tom Howel was decidedly a noticeable young man. There was a sea-breeze about him. The fresh west wind was in his hair, and the light of the sunny waters was in his fearless eyes. You could easily imagine the life he had lived in the old Welsh cottage, and the darling he had been among the fishermen and sailors. Tom had been out through stormy nights, had seen the lightning on the black raging sea, which, for himself, he feared no more than he presently learned to fear his aunt, when she gave him a good scolding for forgetting to change his boots, or to come in for his lunch. Tom knew what it was to sit Sunday after Sunday, and pray and praise in a chapel where the dead people were carried after shipwrecks. Just to look at Tom somehow made one think of adventures, and northwest passages, and desert islands; and when one's eyes passed on Lydia, one remembered all the dear little foolish women, who bear all the pathos of these heros' life, and whose pain and patience make that sweet under-note without which no song is sweet, and no story worth telling.

I don't know whether those who accused the senior Howels of match-making, and pitied Lydia's melancholy doom, imagined that the stern necessity of obedience to a parent's iron will, taught her hand that tender little clinging to her cousin's arm, and gave her eyes that constant smiling glance up to his handsome face! Was that the reason why she so quickly learnt sundry new pieces

of music—pieces with a nor'-wester energy about them, so that more than once I have seen a stray-passer by leaning against the gate, drinking in every note of "When the wind blows in from the sea," in which Tom's fine tenor came out with such grand effect, while Mr. Howel, thus permitted to retire from active musical service, sat in his easy chair, and shouted sincere "bravos." Lydia played the harmonium in chapel on Sundays, and somehow about that time we got into the use of certain hymns with a strong salt flavour, which one could well understand had been familiar favourites at the sea-shore services and love-meetings near Conway. We had "Give to the winds thy fears," and "Jesus, lover of my soul," and "Here on a narrow neck of land," very often about that time.

Yes, there was no mistake about it. The two were in the enchanted ground—all the more enchanted, perhaps, because their near relationship and the easy rule of their mutual home, saved them from the necessity of those explanations and understandings which, if they come to love too soon, like an over-early spring to the buds, ripen but to hinder perfect growth. Under the circumstances, Tom could sit with Lydia through the evening, when she stayed at home, or wander with her over the hills, without any danger of being asked his intentions.

I said I was ten years older than Lydia, and so I was eight-and-twenty, and knew all about it. Tom might seem free to make himself popular with all the girls, and so he did, and no mistake, but it was a popularity which only gave a greater meaning to the faithfulness with which he returned to his little cousin. "Very fine to be her," said the gossips, resuming their disparagement of

her goodness now that the brighter bloom of her face and the added mirth in her laughter gave the lie direct to their pitying surmises. I rather thought it was wonderful she kept her heart so humble and tender. Sunshine ripens, but it parches too. I had often heard girls' frivolity and heartlessness excused because their heads were a little turned, they were so spoilt! and I had been ready to own there was something in that plea, for God has some lessons He can hardly teach us without the rod. But it vexed me to hear such excuse reversed, because one had escaped the peculiar temptation of her happy lot. I was not then reconciled to one of the hardest facts of human nature, that it has a strong inclination to wash black garments, and to defile white ones.

Well, spring ripened into summer, and summer faded into autumn, and the Howels began to emerge from their mourning garments, and Lydia appeared again with those pretty bits of bright pure colour that suited her so well. I fancy I can see those two now, as I saw them then, one breezy morning in the middle of October. Tom had to transact some business about six miles up the country, and Lydia was going with him for the sake of the drive. I met them in the Hopleigh road, just at that part where it dips into a hollow, and the great trees nearly meet over-head. They came along in the old-fashioned chaise, with the grey horse ; the scarlet knot in Lydia's bonnet warming the clear, keen sunlight, that brightened the sere leaves, like a happy smile on a faded face. Tom checked the horse a moment to let his cousin speak with me, and then they were off again. I stood still and watched them round the corner. I was not very lively, just then, but I remember I only thought

it was a blessing to see happiness at all, and that we may enjoy our neighbour's flowers if we can make up our minds to look at them over his hedge. Thank God I don't think I envied them as I watched them round the corner. It was not very far off!

Scarcely half an hour later, I returned along that road. There were a few farm-labourers hanging about, speaking to each other, as if something of interest was happening, though I knew it might be nothing more than the arrival of a few Southdowns. But just a-head, I saw the old-fashioned chaise, empty, a boy leading the grey horse, smoking and dusty.

"The horse took fright," a man told me. "They met a travelling circus, and some fellow blew a trumpet just as they passed, and that started it off. Mrs. Boulder's son was there too in his light cart, and it was a miracle his horses didn't run too, frisky corned beasts as they are. They say young Miss set quite still and the gemmen tried to hold her, but the horse flew like a wild cat; and then the wheel turned on a stone, and over they went. Farmer Boulder, he went after them and picked up Miss, and they've took her home. She's alive, and that's all one can say. The young gemmen, they took him into the first cottage, and they do say they think he be dead!"

I hastened on to Mallowe. There was a group of people about the gates of the old Red House, and the doors were wide open. A gipsy man with a basket of groundsel stood in the court-yard. Lydia had dealt with him for her canaries, which were singing at the tea-room window. The doctor stepped in just as I passed. A little higher up the street, I saw gossiping Miss Vix, with her afternoon dress hastily put on, standing in

her portico, snug and satisfied, wringing her hands, and talking of "awful Providence."

I hurried home, for business must be attended to, but I sent my mother up to the Howels' to offer her services, and I had my shop shut up as soon as possible, and went off there myself. I found my mother sitting by the kitchen fire with the old servant; it was the only fire in the sitting apartments which had not been let out. My mother told me she had not been of any use, but Mrs. Howel came down to us, and begged her to stay through the night, it was a comfort to know she was there. "It was awful to think of Tom lying among strangers," she said. "They'd thought he was dead at first, poor fellow, but now they said he was coming round finely. But Lydia—well, the Lord's will be done!" If you are a simpleton, you'd have said that Mrs. Howel seemed to take it very easily. She was not crying, like the servant, nor sighing, like my mother—she was calm. "She showed more feeling over her story-books," mother said, when she left us. "Because there was nothing else to do, mother," said I.

"If she lives," said the doctor, a day or two later—"and she has a fine constitution—she will never stir off her couch again."

"So long as you save her, doctor," cried Owen Howel, springing up in a frenzy of hope from the chair where he had been sitting with his face buried in his hands, "so long as you only save her!"

In all their agony of fear and hope, the Howels did not forget their nephew. When I begged to be made useful, I was asked, would I go to see him? and I went, and Mr. Howel went with me. Tom's head had struck

against a stone when the chaise overturned, but the medical men said that the principal danger with him was the shock to the whole nervous system. He was so thoroughly unhinged that after one or two experiments, his uncle's visits were forbidden as too exciting. I was still admitted with my books and tidings and messages, and I used to sit through whole evenings with him in the little whitewashed cottage chamber with the great nettle geranium at the window. He was to be kept as quiet and soothed as possible, the doctor said, but that was not to be done by hiding anything from him. If you don't give an invalid all the truth, he is never sure whether you give him half or a quarter. I never hid anything about Lydia. When I first went he seemed quite sure she must die, as I was, too, at that time. And he spoke of his love for her just as frankly as he might if she were already dead ; and, though he cried bitterly, he did not seem rebellious. The fact was, everything then was like a dream, and he, a weak, querulous invalid, finding particular comfort in his toast and tea, and shedding unchecked tears at the thought of a crushed girl slipping away from life and pain, was something quite apart from manly, wilful Tom Howel singing lively glees with Lydia in the old brown parlour. I ignorantly thought he was bearing the worst well ; but the worst was not then—that would be when the tenor voice should begin again, with no soprano to chime therewith !

Gradually Tom grew more and more himself—a sort of ghost of himself. The doctor said that it was necessary he should go away from all painful associations for a time, and an old friend of his father's invited him to

winter in his house at Conway. Tom went away without seeing Lydia, without passing the old house. He was still in the dream, except that hope was startling him into something like consciousness with the wild logic that, as Lydia had not died when the doctors had said she would, she might perfectly recover, though the doctors said she never could.

I did not see Lydia herself till after Christmas. She was always told when I was in the house, and she used to send down dear little messages and apologies that they would not let her ask me to her room. And once or twice, by the old servant, she sent me secret entreaties, that I would come as often as possible, and stay as long as I could, she was sure the change did her mamma good—and would I make some excuse to get her poor mamma to go out for a walk? I did not find it so hard as Lydia's knowledge of her mother's love made her fear. Nor did Mrs. Howel talk over much of her sick daughter, and when she did she spoke quietly and cheerfully. And she scandalized Miss Vix by taking a sincere interest in the fashion of her winter bonnet; "a heartless woman," they called her. But Mrs. Howel sat down and wrote out a receipt for mince-pies to send to a young friend who was keeping her first married Christmas. "She is just two years older than my Lydia," she said, as she turned over the pen box to find a nib that would "go easily." "Her mother was my favourite school-fellow, and she would have been at my wedding, only she was so near her confinement, and she died in my honeymoon. She was making a lace pincushion to be ready for our coming home, and they sent it to me just as she left it, half finished—I've got it now. You

see the world goes round, and there is always somebody in the sunshine and somebody in the dark. But God is always in the same place, dear!"

It was different with Mr. Howel. He did not neglect his business, his energies were sometimes more bustling than ever. But there was always something in the background. He would speak of Lydia suddenly, without anything leading to the subject; he would tell instances of wonderful recoveries, but never in connection with his daughter. He gave one the idea of a man who has girded up his strength to go a certain distance, but will drop down disheartened when he finds that what he thought to be the goal is only a milestone on the course.

I found Lydia quite of her mother's spirit. By the time I saw her all the wrenched disfigurement of torture had passed away. She might be whiter and thinner; she looked like one of the gathered lilies we see in the pictures of the saints; beautiful, not quickly fading, but still—gathered! She did not say a word about the doom that she knew had passed upon her. But she was drawing about her all the many little interests and employments possible for her condition. She knew it was no temporary state. We may smile at the bare discomfort of a hotel where you pass but one night, but if we have to stay there, the sooner we make it homely the better. Idleness and indifference are dangerous tenants, once admitted, they won't always accept notice to quit just when you please. So Lydia already had her pillow lace, and her magazines, and she made me promise I would teach her chess. She was not strong enough yet to make a real use of these things, but she was getting them about her—a prospect to look forward to.

She told me they were always hearing from Tom, and he was growing quite strong and well, and she was so glad they had let her write a line or two to him, herself, that very morning for the first time. Of course she had "always sent messages. But messages seem like telegrams, you know, they've been repeated over by other people, and there's always something left out at last. But a letter is next to a spoken word, and if it isn't as good in some ways, it is better in one, you can get it out whenever you like and read it over again. Isn't it a queer sensation to feel that your letter has just reached somebody ever so far away, and has put you into their minds. It is always so pleasant to be remembered! It would not be so bitter to part from one's dearest friend, never to hear of each other again, only that we feel while we are mortal new impressions will come, and though the old ones may stay, they will grow very faint. That is why it is more soothing to think of friends in heaven than of friends abroad; we feel sure that the perfect can never forget. And yet, Ruth dear, I think the difference is all in our fancy, for I believe that even in this world people do never really forget. You may put fresh wax over an old seal, but the old seal is still underneath for all that. But it isn't worth while to think about such things, dear; you have something better to do."

It was in the very early spring—the same time of year as he first came to Mallowe—that Tom Howel returned to his uncle's house. He came in by the evening coach, and his uncle met him, and the two walked up the High Street together, just as the candles were being lit in the parlours behind the shops, and all the families were sitting down together to tea.

"I had the table set in Lydia's room," said Mrs. Howel, telling us her simple story, "for we thought it was best he should come there at once; Lyddy said so. And she got me to trim a piece of lace round her pillow. 'You know, mamma,' says she, 'it isn't a sick-bed, it's only a couch!' And while I was down in the kitchen, seeing after things, Sally came in, and said, 'Miss has asked me to put her little dressing-case beside her sofa, and she is turning over her coral necklace and lockets, and as I came out of the room, mum, she was actually fastening it on.' Sally thought it might be a good sign, poor lass, but when I went up-stairs the coral necklace was off again, and shut up in the case, and she had only put on a broad blue ribbon, with a little old-fashioned silver pendant, that she used to wear when she was a child, but which I hadn't seen for years. She kept on talking about all sorts of little things till we heard them come in, and Tom came running up-stairs. She seemed to give a sort of little shudder; you see she had not been used to anybody moving quickly lately, nor indeed to anybody but elderly people, except when you have looked in. And Tom rather rushed in, and made towards her, and she put out her hands with a little cry, almost as if to hold him back. But, instead, her two hands went into both of his, and he stooped down and kissed her. There was quite a gush of fresh air came in with them; and Tom looked so fresh and healthy, that she made him stand behind the light that she might see him well. And he sat down on the hassock beside her to take his tea, and she showed him the lace-working pillow, and the little desk she had written her letters on, which one of her father's men had planned for her. Tom was

full of talk at first, but presently he got quiet, and then said he had better go to his room and look after his unpacking. But when I went into the passage, about half an hour after, I found out he had gone off in the dark, for there was his candlestick standing on the table. So I went to his door and knocked once or twice, but he did not answer, and I took leave and went in. And there he was, with his face smothered down in the bedclothes, and I could hear him sobbing in the dark. And I sat down on the bed, and thought to comfort him, but I just cried too, the first time I'd ever joined in a cry over poor Lyddy. For Mr. Howel would think the world was coming to an end if I broke down. I'm afraid the poor lad has got it into his head he might have taken more care of her, for over and over again he kept saying, 'I wish that it had been me,—and that it had killed me!' I told him she did not suffer very much now, and that we would all be very happy together, and that they are often the happiest homes which have one great sinless sorrow in them. But I would not let him come down to supper. I told Lyddy he was tired and had gone to bed; but I think she guessed all about it. It quite startled me; it was worse than his uncle had been, though he is her own father. No doubt, though the doctors say he is quite well again, he is still shaken-like, and not fit for shocks. You know when you knock a china plate against something, it mayn't seem damaged, but it's not safe to wash it in hot water."

Tom at once took his old place at his uncle's side; and he had not come home too soon, for though the spring days grew brighter and warmer, Mr. Howel became gradually later in the morning and wearied earlier in the

afternoon. I fancy that one or two good contracts had slipped through his fingers in the course of that winter. Tom, however applied himself steadily to business. Was he really graver and more silent, or did our consciousness of his great sorrow cast its own shadow over him? In those early days it was hard to say. He did not look changed; he was as dashingly handsome as ever, but yet there was a something which wrought into the manner of his respectful workmen, and his frankly sympathetic girl-acquaintances—just that difference which one detects between a crowd's huzzas for a successful prince, and its cheers for a defeated patriot. Those who are nearest to a secret are often the last to find it out, and I think everybody in the place understood more than Mr. and Mrs. Howel themselves. To them the two seemed such children, and so nearly related, too—"it was only likely they should love each other," Mrs. Howel would have said, quite innocently. She had been a woman of thirty-two when "Howel" made her his definite offer, and married her six months after; and as our own experience is very apt to foreshadow another's future, doubtless in her maternal dreams she had seen Lydia—not quite thirty-two, perhaps, but still not just yet—admired by some substantial young swain, whose interview with "Howel" in the counting-house would be followed by an elysium of purchases at the mercer's and upholsterer's. An honest motherly romance! But it had quite blinded her to the possibility of Love slipping in unawares, so that when he had actually done so, she did not recognise him. Was it better or worse for those two that it was so? I don't know that it mattered much either way. For some people, whatever happens is good, and for others the re-

verse. (Circumstances depend most on the soil where they are planted.)

No sound of glee-singing through the Howels' open windows that summer-time. Tom always spent his evenings at home; he found a good deal of exercise in the course of business, and he did not seek another companion to wander with him on the sunny uplands and scented lanes where he had walked with Lydia. One or two families put forth kindly feelers of invitation towards him, but his merry visitings and light-hearted pleasure-seeking plans seemed all done. And yet, as I said before, the change showed less in himself than in the mere outward conditions of his life. One must not measure the depth of suffering by the readiness with which the mourner sinks into the pallor and silence consistent with his case. You must remember the strength of the back as well as the weight of the burden. The strong man is convalescent two days after the doctor said he would die, and the face that has the habit of smiles will still smile through its tears!

The sight of Tom Howel, left alone in the pride of his strong young beauty, added pathos to our thoughts of Lydia, on the couch whence she would never rise. On Sunday afternoons, when the High Street was in a little bustle with the dispersing schools and Bible-classes, giddy faces would grow serious as they looked up at the bright windows of the old Red House, and a touch of genuine romance would thrill through many a heedless courtship, at the thought of the two within, so closely joined, and yet so sternly parted. We knew they were alone together, for of late Mr. and Mrs. Howel had taken to attend service in the afternoon instead of the morning. "Some-

times he reads to her, and sometimes they talk," gossiped the servant Sally ; " and sometimes they don't even say much, and once or twice when I've been about the room, I've seen her stealing looks at him as if she pitied him. It's odd, it is ; you'd always think that she fancied he had got the worst of it."

Strength came back—all the strength that would ever come. And, Lydia learned chess, and grew to excel in pillow-lace. Also, she got my library catalogue, and drew up the plan of a fine course of study ; but that she never carried out. " After all, I like to feel free to read the books that friends recommend to me," she said apologetically, " and those that suit me best, and do me most good, are just those that one can't classify at all. I should think books are like scenery, dear. One reads standard authors much as one may go to admire a mountain-pass or a beautiful bay, and may find them very grand and delightful, but still be glad to get back to the quiet lanes and field-paths, or flat beach, where the beauty looks at you as if it loved you too well to care for your admiration. Tom says something like that. Tom has been to almost every well-known place in Wales,—Snowdon and Cader-Idris and Llangollen,—but he says he never saw anything he cared for like the level sands before his father's house, with the one great black rock on the left, just far enough out for the high tide to make it an island. I told him that was because it was his home. But he says no. For he once stayed a week or two at a part of the coast where nobody sees any beauty at all, the rocks are so low and ordinary, and no fine scenery behind them. And Tom says he took a walk about sunset, and came to a mass of low black rocks, with the waves sob-

bing over a broken boat that had been dashed among them. And the sun was just sinking in the sea, and against the glory he could see another boat far out. Tom says he has never forgotten that place, and he cannot think why. He told me about it one evening last summer—the sunset brought it into his mind. I think he remembers because of the boats. They meant something more, and Tom felt that without knowing it. I think you always feel attracted to anything that you feel has a meaning, whether or no you can make it out. I remember a picture I once saw of a dead bird. Everybody thought a great deal of it, because it was so beautifully done, that you might fancy you saw the breeze stirring the poor feathers. But that was not why I cared for it. Close to the bird there was a gathered sprig of holly, and a little further off there was a broken bit of earthenware. I have made ever so many meanings to that picture, and I can't think which the artist intended."

"Most likely none of them Lydia," I said. "Perhaps he put in the holly and the chip merely to see how he could paint flowers and still life. But whatever meaning suited you best was the right one for you. And the painter was only the greater genius if he gave it to you unconsciously, just honestly trying to do his best, and thinking very little of it!"

But Lydia managed to do more than to read and amuse herself with pretty trifles. It was wonderful what a many little household duties she drew towards her couch. At first, they let her do them, thinking it gave her pleasure, and did her good; but by-and-by she did them because it became natural that she should do them, and because she did them better than anybody else.

Theirs did really appear a very happy home. Though Mr. Howel had become an old man in those few months, still he was cheerful—and hopeful. "I wish he was not," Lydia one day whispered, after he had been indulging in very merry sallies. "I wish I heard him laughing like that, and yet knew that he believed I shall never—never —" and only the sweet soft eyes finished the sentence. Mrs. Howel was as cheery and bustling as of old. "It's bad enough for her to be shut up for ever with us at our best," she said, "so we needn't make it worse by doldrums!" But over and again, when I made one of their family circle, I saw Lydia's pitiful yearning glance towards Tom.

"Ruth," she said, "it is dreadful to find what selfishness and arrogance gets into our very thanksgivings."

"Yes," I answered, "if they are made on the pattern of the Pharisee's, 'Lord I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.'"

"Somehow we seem to discover our blessings by the help of others' trials," she went on, musingly. "I can't help being thankful that it is I who am laid up instead of Tom. He has so much the worst of it, I think, poor fellow."

"You wouldn't think so if you were in his place," I observed.

"I don't know," she said, picking at the edging of her pillow. "I should be quite happy as I am if it were not for thinking of poor Tom. It is very well now, perhaps; but it will be awfully hard for him some day."

"Well, Lydia," I remonstrated, "have you not something to suffer too? and yet you own you are happy."

"Oh, but that's different," she answered; "and besides I'm a woman!"

Which wasn't a logical answer, as we understand logic. But some of us get on faster with our lessons, and begin to puzzle out the first lines of pages that the rest of us will only turn over in heaven.

I stayed there that evening till they were all gathered in the little upper room that had grown so cheerful, brave Mrs. Howel presiding over the shining tea-pot, her husband in the easy chair, reading aloud the comic column of the county paper, and Tom sitting in his usual corner beside the couch where Lydia lay. Then I went on to call upon Miss Vix, who was ruefully glad to see me, because "it's nice to have somebody to speak to, my dear. There's the dressmaker promised me my silk dress last night, and it's never come home yet, and I believe she has put it off to go on with the apothecary's daughters' winter dresses that they want to have ready for the Boulders' party. Mrs. Boulder has not invited me. Of course, I should not have gone if she had; for, as everybody knows, my papa was an officer in the army, while, though the Boulders are very decent people, still they're only tenant-farmers; and though I shouldn't wish to be at all proud, yet there are proper distinctions which ought to be kept up. But it would have been only civil for them to give me the refusal. And there's my servant going—going to another place for just a pound more wages, which I stood out I wouldn't give her. And what do you think I've heard she has the impudence to say?—that she only asked for a rise, because she knew she wouldn't get it, and that she'd have stayed on cheerfully but for my temper. My temper! Me, that is as meek

as a lamb! And she's chief friend with the parlour-maid at the house where our curate lodges, so one don't know what reports may go round, though I don't suppose he'd demean himself to gossip with his servant. Ah, it's a miserable world, Miss Garrett!"

"Well, Miss Vix," I said, "there are a good many thorns in every wood, but there are blackberries too, and the very brambles bear roses. But it is not those who get the worst scratched who cry the loudest."

"I know who you are thinking about," she answered. "You have just come from the Howels. You must please to remember that Lydia is now set aside from the struggle of life. She is just made into a martyr, or a saint, or something of that sort. It is very easy to be good when everybody is petting and patting us, body and soul, as tenderly as if we were a sick canary. Look at her father and mother—very slaves to her. Look at that fine young man wasting his life for her sake. Look at her very glances, watched and understood plainer than any other body's spoken wishes. I tell you what, Miss Garrett, a so-called great affliction like hers is not half as trying as the wear and tear of every-day existence."

"Put it in a simpler way, Miss Vix," I said: "say it is better to be chastened by God than tormented by ourselves. There is balm on the point of his sword, and poison on the points of our pins."

The next change in the Howels' household was the mother's death. She did not die suddenly, but she was not ailing very long, and none thought seriously. It was very sad for her husband and her daughter. Mr. Howel was quite broken up by this last blow. His love had come to him late in life, but he could not remember

how he had lived without his wife. He was one of those who cannot understand that the machinery of life must go on as best it can, although the main spring is broken. He could not reflect what a dreadful world it would be if nobody was hard-hearted enough to give directions for funerals, and such other necessary and decent ceremonies. He was one of those who are inclined to sit down and say "that nothing is any matter any more." Only now he had gone past saying so, and only laid his poor old white head (such a brave iron-grey head but such a short time before) on his trembling withered hands, and got up and sat down just when and where Tom told him, and everybody said what a blessing Tom was.

I could not be with Lydia at that time as much as I should have liked. Her father was always in the room, sitting in the corner, silent, and there was something in his silence which silenced everybody else. Often and often that winter as I passed the Red House on Sunday afternoon, and saw the firelight flickering on the ceiling, and sometimes a man's shadow waving up and down, I gave that pitiful thought for Lydia, which I think God accepts as a prayer. It must have been so dreary! For Mrs. Howel had become not only the guide and ruler, but the life and light of the house. And gradually, gradually, there crept over it a sense of discomfort, an air of neglect. It was like a house without a woman in it. The servants might be faithful, but between the honestest hired service and the devotion of love there is much such a difference as between the warmth of a glove and the comfort of a clasping hand. And Lydia knew it all the while, and the sting of it was that she could not help it, nor had she any kind maiden aunt, or

accommodating female cousin whom she could call to the rescue. She could only lie still and give little gentle hints and suggestions, whose very gentleness made the poor servants so nervously eager to obey, that they doubled the disaster of failure and defeat. Personally Lydia lost an untold treasure in her mother, but in the consciousness of her mother's gain, she would have accepted that loss if she could have supplied it to the others. It was not her own loneliness—no, nor the endurance of the unintentional neglects and unsympathetic kindnesses which befall an invalid who is not first in her nurse's thoughts, which made those new shadowy hollows about her face, and shed over it that wan look of careworn solicitude, which all the first agony of pain and sorrow had failed to give. Not that Lydia ever lost her cheerfulness, but just for a time her cheerfulness lost its spontaneity.

Mr. Howel gradually sank into a state so low and clouded that his presence in his daughter's room became but a cipher, and I felt it to be no longer an intrusion upon his grief to go and sit with her there. He had long been unable to join in conversation; he now ceased to attempt it, though the kindly nature of the man still lived in his hospitable pressing upon me the few addled dainties of their tea-table, and inquiring after my mother's health and our general prosperity, at least six times during each of my visits. Despite the feeble intensity with which he watched his daughter, and his agitation when he knew her to be suffering, or imagined any change for the worse, he generally spoke to her with a kind of peevish deference, as if he felt that he had wronged her by succumbing to his sorrows, and some-

what resented the patience with which she bore his weakness. He got a habit of wandering in and out of the room, and of looking into cupboards, though in reply to Lydia's cheerful, "What are you seeking, papa? Perhaps I can tell you where it is," he would always answer, "Nothing at all, nothing at all." After the candles were lit, however, he generally sat still, gazing into the fire, apparently quite unaware of anything about him ; and it was when he was in this state that I would draw my chair close to Lydia's couch, and we would snatch a little confidential conversation.

I noticed that Tom did not always come in as early as he used. One or two evenings that I stayed late he had not come in when I left, and whenever he did arrive in good time, there seemed a weight hanging upon him, very different to his old buoyancy. Was it only the heavy steps of Time, burdened with responsibility, treading down his spirits ? Alas, there were dreary whispers about Tom stealing through Mallowe. I will do human nature the justice to say, that, for once, nobody seemed to rejoice in the evil, as human nature is so prone to do. At first it was hard to tell what the whispers were, they were so ambiguous. Some sighed, and said, "he was not very well ;" others shook their heads, and spoke of "not quite right ;" and the rest asked, "What could anybody expect ?" And in the meantime a mildew crept over his fresh manly beauty, and the sea breezes died out of his hair, and his quarterdeck step changed to a slow, dull saunter. But what many must have suspected, nobody said, until one bleak March evening one of the young Boulders (the same one who had raised Tom senseless from the accident in the Hopleigh road) found

him in a denser senselessness and a deeper danger in the foul gutter of a bye-lane not far from the Red House. Mr. Boulder lifted him up, and led him home, screening his shame as best he might from the flaring lights and sharp eyes of a market night in the High Street.

It must have been awful. Mr. Boulder took him straight to his own room. But there could be no concealment from the servants who admitted them. And it was necessary that Lydia should know something of the truth, or what wild fancies would haunt and torture her utter helplessness! Mr. Boulder went to her, and told her. He was a gentle sensitive giant of a man, and I am sure he would sooner have lain on the rack than have gone through that task. "I do hope she will believe I did everything as much for the best as I know how," he said afterwards, which let me know that Lydia's womanhood had for once got the better of her right-wiseness, and caused her at first to turn fiercely upon the hand that had dared to succour her darling in his degradation. The two hid it from the poor old uncle, or they fancied they did, for they staved off the reiterated question, "What is the matter with Tom?" and Mr. Boulder stayed with the fallen man through the night, and Lydia kept her lonely vigil in her distant chamber, having sent the terrified servant girls to bed. "I went to her once or twice," said Mr. Boulder, "for she wasn't angry with me after the first minute. 'Ah, sir,' she said once, 'when my mother was dying, and I could not go to her, it was not as hard as now!' And when I went to tell her that he was coming round, and it would soon be all right—for really I'd feared it might be something more than drink,—she bade me tell him, 'not to fret,

she knew it wasn't his fault, and they would take care that things were managed differently in future, but not to fret, nor let himself feel disgusted with himself.' I did have a hard time with him, sure enough," added honest Mr. Boulder, "he did not seem to rouse to any feeling, till I drew up the blind and let in the dawn, and then he burst out crying like a child, poor fellow."

Not one word did Lydia say to me of her cousin's humiliation, when next she saw me, though she looked firmly in my face, and I am sure felt that I knew it all. But in the course of conversation, she told me that Tom was not at all well, and that she had always been sure that his whole nervous system had been quite upset by the accident which ended her own active part in the world. I was informed that Tom's life since had been a great mistake, and that in his affectionate sympathy for her he had shut himself too much from healthy external influences and interests. That she was very much to blame, for not interfering before—it was just her selfishness, and I must remember she had even spoken on the subject, and yet had let it go on. She had been talking to Tom about it now, and he really was so ill that he was glad to listen to advice. And he had promised her that he would go out when he was invited, and that he would sometimes ask friends of his own to pass a cheerful evening with him in the tea-room, and she had given the girls orders to brighten it up,—perhaps I would just look in and see if they had done so tolerably well.

I do not deny that there was some foundation for her excuses for Tom. But I knew what all this was for her. O, it is very, very hard when we ourselves must open the door to let our nearest and dearest pass out where we

cannot follow. And if it had been her, she would not have gone—she would not have needed to go! "O, but that is different, and besides I'm a woman." Well, thank God, if that explanation kept the bitterness quite out of her heart. For really I don't know whether it is not better to have one's idol shivered downright than with just a nasty little crack in it, so that you go on trying to think it is as good as before, while all the while you know it isn't! But Lydia was one of those women whose idols never are shivered, because they'll pick them up if they're in a thousand pieces, and put them together again, and gild them over thicker than ever, so that you won't see the joinings. And they'll persuade themselves that they were born expressly to do that patching-up. For my own part, I'll never believe but that some men are better and truer than any woman, and out of justice to them, I feel it to be my bounden duty to come down upon the defaulters pretty smartly! But then Edward says that justice is my forte, and I think some other people think so, and don't like me any better for it. Nevertheless I could tell them that I had been made a fool of once or twice in my time, but I prefer to keep my own counsel!

And so Tom Howel sorrowfully and shyly returned to our quiet village society. There were not wanting good people to hold out a kindly hand to one who had been really sore smitten in life. And gradually his downcast face brightened, and some of the old dash came back to his mien and step. And there used to be little glee parties at the apothecary's. And Tom's fine tenor was as good as ever, once the rust wore off, and the Webster girls had such beautiful voices, all three of

them, but Minnie's, the youngest, was best of all. And Minnie had bright hair and curls. And Minnie had blue eyes. And without any painful resemblance, Minnie was like a bright memory of Lydia Howel. And when Tom began to go to tea at the apothecary's of a Sunday, and to walk out with the girls and their brother—the two elder girls and young Webster in front, and Tom and Minnie behind—then we all felt that in the new love was embalmed the relics of the old one. But oh, why didn't he try to match Lydia's heart and soul, instead of her eyes and hair?

"Happy the wooing that's not long a doing," says an old proverb, and it is not bad advice in a world full of commonplace people. Tom Howel was not very long a-wooing Minnie Webster, and between their "regular engagement"—which was duly known to the whole place next day—and their marriage, no longer time elapsed than sufficed for the plenishing of a pretty little house in a new terrace at the back of the High Street. And Lydia certainly contributed her share. There were a half dozen tidys of her own work, and a beautiful screen, and a set of knitted bedroom curtains, and a pair of sofa-cushions. "They have all been made since our accident," Lydia softly whispered to me. "Up-stairs I have some more things that I made before. I could not give them. I don't think it would be right. One doesn't believe in good luck and bad luck, you know. But still one doesn't like to do things that may seem unlucky, dear."

I don't want to censure Minnie Webster. She knew she would never have been Tom Howel's wife if the grey horse had not started off on that bright October morn-

ing. It is one thing to be a second love when the first love has been laid down—sadly enough, perhaps, but voluntarily—like the abandoned gewgaws of a child who has grown too wise to wear anything but pure gold and real gems. It is another thing to be a second love when God has taken the first love to Himself, and the consoling affection steals to the door of the sepulchre, and sits down there, and guards the poor silent dust within. And it is yet another thing when the first love is still beating warm behind some impassable bar of circumstance, and the second love is only second-best—what can be got, instead of what is wanted. Doubtless Minnie felt herself something like the travelling companions to whom we turn with forced cheerful commonplaces, while our hearts are bleeding with the severance from the kith and kin whom we left sobbing on the railway platform. Yet I think I know some women who would have risen equal to the trial, who, loving this man, would not have grudged to give their whole life only to stanch his wound, and who in the end would have won their exceeding great reward. But we can scarcely blame a girl because she has not in her the stuff which makes heroines and saints. One can understand that it might give Minnie a little pang when she knew her lover left her earlier than usual to have time for a talk with Lydia. But it was neither kindly nor wise of her to pout and flout, and shed fretful tears, and say peevish words. Surely she would not have loved Tom better if he had not felt one tender regret for the heart that had so blamelessly lost him! Perhaps, on his part, he ought to have been strong enough to dedicate all his warm young life to a sorrowful devotion, but that would have cost her his courtship

altogether, and besides this very weakness, this pititul struggle between soul and body, would have been his strongest claim on the patient and tender loving-kindness of one of those dear fools of women who think themselves a cheap ransom for a man's happiness. Ye men, good men, great men, with the best of wives, for what do you think they love you most? For the triumph that they exaggerate, for the praises that they never think warm enough, for all the blessings which they always will maintain are only what you deserve? Delusion! Rather for some weakness that you have forgotten—for the misfortune that made one part of your way so rough that you have been maimed ever since—for the temptation that beset you so closely, that your breath came hard and fast, and you won a very bare victory at last. But there are nice pretty girls whose hearts beat when they hear of such things, much like a schoolboy's when he reads of Trafalgar or Waterloo. They would like to be the devoted heroine, as he would like to be the general. They feel sure they could be, if an unappreciative world would let them at once jump into their appropriate places, without insisting on such a mean, pointless, painful roundabout course of discipline. And so in disgust, the young lady marries the man who has the most money, and the schoolboy takes to the counter. And well for them that they do so. Better for Minnie Webster had she never put her hand to a romance that was too much for her.

They were married in the height of summer-time. Mr. Howel was far too weak and doited to be present at the ceremony, and the young bridegroom was alone among the bride's kindred and townsfolk. Before they went off

for their honeymoon, Tom wanted to drive round to the old Red House.

"They are all of my people that I have in the world," he pleaded, "and it is not their fault they are not here to greet you to-day."

"But I never heard of such a thing!" pouted Minnie. "What wouldn't it make people say? They oughtn't to expect it, Tom."

"They don't expect it," he said, very quietly.

I was in hopes Minnie's was but a little involuntary spurt of opposition, and that she would retract it, with a loving penitence that would more than make amends. What possible victories there were in her power! Without disturbing the old love, she might have won a greater and a purer, which should have enclosed and kept it, like the lichens we see in crystals. But Minnie sat silent by her bridegroom with a dry flush on her cheek and a tremor about her mouth. And they did not drive round to the old Red House.

I went there on my way from the wedding breakfast. There was an attempt at keeping festival. A bouquet of white roses on Lydia's table, her father in his best attire, and she herself in a fair white dress, with her delicate hands keeping holiday idleness. It struck me that she was really on a higher level of happiness than the pretty excited little bride, and I thought was there something in Miss Vix's old excuse "that a so-called great affliction is not half as trying as the wear and tear of everyday existence?" But then, how if the person were reversed? If it was Minnie lying here, crushed under stern necessity, broken, deserted—and Lydia there, happy, favoured, with life bright and wide before her—

how then? And I felt that then there would have been a sobbing frenzied rebel in the sick-room, and thither would have come a gentle, soothing woman, saying, by a thousand sweet ministries, "I have not taken your place. Nobody ever will. But for his own sake let him love me as well as he can, and we will all be as happy as we may." Ah, if one plays their own part nobly, we have little reason to whisper that perhaps that is the only part they can play at all!

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Howel came back from their trip to Conway. I wonder if he took Minnie to look for the low rocks with the broken boat among them? Perhaps he went alone. But the broken boat would have rotted away by that time, and there might be no ship sailing out to sea, and no sunset in the sky. Perhaps he could not even find the spot. But the two came back duly and settled down.

Nobody knew if it was dull in the old Red House. Lydia never said so. Lydia never looked so. It was very, very seldom that Tom and his wife spent an evening with her. Old Mr. Howel was very feeble and childish now, and sometimes did not remember that his wife was dead, and used to ask where she was, and when she was coming back, to which Lydia always answered brightly, that "mamma had only gone a little way and we shall see her again presently," whereupon the poor old man would sometimes mutter to himself that they had better keep the tea waiting a while, and Lydia would know what was in his head, when he refused to finish up the toast, and kept the leavings carefully on the monkey before the fire. Mrs. Tom declared that all this made her dreadfully nervous, and that in Tom's in-

terest and her own, she must take care of herself. So Tom was obliged to be satisfied with running up to his cousin's room whenever business brought him to the office. Mrs. Tom guessed at that, but she never made a safe and soothing outlet for his feelings by inquiring after Lydia. And if he brought forward the subject she silenced him by tiffish, shrinking replies. And yet she felt herself wronged by his silence.

At last Mr. Howel died—died the same week that Tom's first baby was born. It was a boy, and it was christened Owen. It had four successors—another boy and three girls. The second boy was Tom, and the girls were Minnie, Sara, and Annie, after the mother and the maternal aunts. No Lydia, not even in a second name, though that title was the paternal grandaunt's as well as hers, who, as Mrs. Tom often remarked, "seemed such a distant relation now—cousinship was scarcely any relation at all—once the heads of the families were gone."

Mr. Howel had left Lydia his funded property, and Tom the business and some working capital. Neither share was worth as much as had once seemed likely. Lydia's included the house, reserving to Tom a right in the timber-yard and business premises. Her income was very slender, but sufficient to let her keep on the old servant, and a young girl as a more personal attendant. And any stranger coming to Mallowe must have wondered who this Miss Howel could be, of whom he heard so much and yet never saw. For Miss Howel was represented by some thoughtful gift at every wedding, by some godchild in every family—except among that group of children to whom her gentle heart must

especially have yearned. Our stranger would have heard people, speaking of their troubles, say that "they felt more resigned after they had talked it over with Miss Howell." And yet when any blessing befell a household, there was always a friendly competition as to "who should go and tell Miss Howel." She was not lonely. I remember she looked at me one day, and laughingly said, "she was always deep in somebody's joys or sorrows. It was only almost too exciting." But yet there must have been times, early mornings, wet evenings, wakeful nights, when there would come upon her a sense of solitude. Human nature is not ethereal enough to be quite satisfied with being a beneficent fairy, or even a good angel. If Tom might have come in and out familiarly, and told her all the healthy outer-world news, enriched by that undercurrent of consciousness that always flows between old friends—if his wife would have brought her work, and given her a share in her anxieties and happiness, and have gathered the children about her, and let her have some loving rights over these little hearts with her own blood beating in them! But Minnie Howel could not do this. She shut up her dislike to Lydia, till it curdled into hatred, and stood like a cold stone between herself and her husband. She had married Tom with her eyes open, but now she felt the old story like a bitter personal wrong. She had not stamped it out, as perhaps she had hoped to do, she had not written another over it as a nobler woman would unconsciously have done. But she had worn her own heart out with it,—and it wasn't a heart warranted to wear long or well!

There came bad times and an opposition builder to

Mallowe. Tom lost money and prestige. Mrs. Tom, with a very bad grace, wore her old dresses and bought no new ones. The children were sent to a cheaper school. Lydia heard rumors among her visitors. She saw more than rumors in poor Tom's careful, broken-hearted looks. And at last she sent for her cousin, and told him she wanted to give up the Red House. It was too large and dreary for a single sick woman, she should prefer cheerful lodgings at the other end of the village, nearer to most of her friends. But she would rather not sell the house,—"it is an old family property, isn't it, Tom?"—so if it would suit him to live in it—— He might sell his own nice, new, fashionable little box to the officer of the inland revenue, who was looking for one, as he was about to marry. No, she shouldn't take any rent,—wouldn't the house be Tom's own when she was gone?—but, as of course, he wouldn't wish to be under any obligation to her, he might pay her whatever was required for her lodgings,—she scarcely knew whether she might not be making a very good bargain.

"But can't you stay here, if we come?" said Tom. Poor fellow, he was a father, and ruin had stared him so out of countenance, that you must not blame him for catching at the offered rescue, although his rash proposal divulged that he had some idea of the real motive for the change. And was it his pride interfered, or a nobler wish to give her a good excuse to accept this compromise, that he went on? "If you find it dull now, it will be lively enough with the five children."

"Didn't I say I want a room that looks out upon fields?" replied Lydia, steadily, "and I hear there are some to be let near the church, where one can actually

hear the singing during the services. Think what a treat that will be for me!"

Who tell most stories, and are most artful—the good women or the bad ones?

Lydia went to her lodgings, and the new branch of the Howels filled the Red House, and for a time things went on better with them. In fact, the deepest secret of their adversity was not the stagnation of trade, nor the opposition—it was something in Tom. It was that something which had emboldened the new builder to come. Of late other people than kindly Mr. Boulder had found poor Tom more than once in muddy gutters. And there was no help for it now—little hope for him. He had had a kindly physician once, but he made some fatal mistake in following out her prescription. They were both lonely now—those two women. Mrs. Tom sent off her scared, sickly children, and sat watching in the great tea-room, grown mildewed and shabby; sat watching and weeping, to think of her old-fashioned garments and moth-eaten carpet, and no parties, and few callers; sat watching, and framing reproaches with stings sharp enough to half-vitalise her husband's deadened consciousness, when a reeling step on the stairs should announce his return. But Lydia hid her face on her pillow, and wept for the brave lover of her girlhood—the dashing, pure-hearted boy who had taught her those breezy hymns! Ah, that old parable on the coast by Conway! And, after all, whose was the boat that was dashed on the rocks, while the other went sailing away—away?

But when the scandal grew so loud that her own acquaintances no longer tried to pretend they did not hear it, then Lydia said, calmly,—

"I am sure it is not his fault. No more his fault than it is my fault that I cannot rise from my couch. His nerves were completely shattered by that accident. We have both suffered in different ways, but his has been the worst, poor boy!"

From that she never wavered. Was it so? Or was it but the outcome of an inherent weakness of nature, which a strong, tender hand might have held in? Who can tell?

One summer evening in the golden twilight, Tom visited her in her new apartments. He came in his best clothes, but even those had been in the gutter more that once. Poor Tom! He didn't know what to say, for most of his evenings were passed in pot-houses, and his days in stupefaction, and what could he tell her of all that? But she talked to him—made him admire some green things growing in a drawing-room *jardinière*, showed him her cat, and her album, made him talk about his children, wouldn't ask him to stay to supper, "because Minnie would be expecting him," but would read her chapter before supper, if he would just stay to give her the treat of somebody to make family worship with. "And oh," she sobbed, when she told me the story, days after, "he said 'good-night' so kindly, but he looked ill and old then, and he walked to the door of the room, and there he turned back suddenly, and stooped down and kissed me, and said 'Good-bye, good-bye!' and when he lifted up his face, he looked so like the young man that came in his mourning from Conway!"

Next night, Tom Howel did not return home. That poor fretful wife of his was never quite the same after that last vigil, when, as the hours crawled by, she would

have blessed even the horrid reeling step in the hall. In the morning they sought for him. They went first to the tavern—alas! He had been there, but not late. He had looked in about nine o'clock, but only to leave an ordinary message for some crony. He had told the barmaid he had been for a long walk. He did not take anything there, but the girl could not say whether he had been drinking or not. He did not say whether he was going home. He went by the back door.

Now, there were two ways from this tavern to the Red House—one by the front door across the market-place and down the High Street. The other led across a field, and through a lane which opened on the High Street just below the Howels' house. Part of this lane ran beside the canal.

They dragged it, and they found him. Out of the slimy mud they drew him, and laid him on the gravel walk, in the stare of the sunny sky. Tenderly enough they touched him, those old bargeman ; they had known him years before, when he had joked and laughed with them, because, at least more than anything in that inland place, they savoured of his old pursuits, and his old friends at Conway!

There was a great outcry with the widow and the children in the old Red House. Everybody thought of them. I stole away to the cottage by the church.

"Miss Howel wants to be by herself," said her little maid, who was crying; "she told me to give her very kindest thanks to anybody that called. But she wants to be by herself for a little while."

Had he fallen into the water in the dusk, or ——? The civil jurymen at the inquest did not raise a doubt—

till they had given their verdict, and then they conjectured as freely as anybody.

"Poor Tom," said Lydia, when I saw her. "I'm sure he meant to amend. That was what he meant when he kissed me. And he had taken a quiet walk to think over it. And very likely he was faint and dizzy, as people often are, when they try to leave off stimulants. And it was always very early dark in that lane—I remember that well—and so he fell in. And God let it happen because He saw that Tom had suffered enough, and He is such a pitiful God, and knew that it was easier for Tom and for us, that he should go when he was feeling a little happier and more like himself. I always think that if I might choose when to die, it should not be when I was very miserable or in great pain."

And then she went and lived with Minnie in the Red House, and her slender income was all devoted to Tom's children. And how she did try to keep in the background, and to convince those girls and boys that their pretty, active mother was much nicer company than the poor invalid distant relation! But they would tell her all their secrets, and oh, how bitterly did Mrs. Howel complain when at last Lydia was informed of young Owen's intended marriage, before she had any idea of it!

"Well," said Miss Vix, in tart reply to her bewailings (not being a tender-hearted woman, who feels there are some wounds that must not be touched even by truth), "you can't say she took away your first chance of him."

And when Lydia died, young Owen put on her grave her name, her age, the years of her affliction, and this line —

"Behold, we count them happy which endure."

V.

"SOMEDAY."

A FEW years ago, my chambers in the city needing some repairs, I spent a short time in the house of an old friend in Bloomsbury. He was a medical man and not very rich; for he had two or three tricks that were rather drawbacks to his success. He would tell plain truth to his patients—even his best ones; so some got well inconveniently quick, and never needed him again, and others were offended, and carried their pet chronic miseries to more sympathetic quarters. And he never lost patience with poor helpless invalids who couldn't pay at all. Sternly enough he told Mrs. De Brook, the stockbroker's wife, that the best remedy for her "nervous dyspepsia" was less care of herself, and more care for others. But he never told the poor government clerk's widow nothing could delay her death, and that she might as well die without his gratuitous visits, which would have saved time and trouble, and gained him some black reputation as a medical prophet. No, Dr. Chester was not a rich man; but he had an income large enough for one of the old brown houses near the Foundling. Very much alike are all those houses, with deep areas, and two windows beside the door, and two rows of three above it, and a third row of two in a sloping roof—like prominent eyes in a retreating fore-

head—behind a gutter, considerately constructed for the use of cats, and what with these gutters, and the deep areas, and the squares, Bloomsbury is surely the happy land of the feline race. And you may make very accurate guesses as to the interior of those houses. There will be two rooms all the way up, with an extra back room at the end of the hall, and perhaps a paper partition in the large front attic. If there is a doctor's name on the door (and there are many doctors' names on the doors in Bloomsbury), then the front parlor will be the family dining-room, and the back one the consulting room, with its soothing prospect of a flagged court, and a tree in somebody else's garden peeping over the wall; and you'd better not look into the third chamber unless you want to scare yourself with certain suspicious objects bottled up in spirits. The two rooms on the first floor will be drawing rooms unless the family is unmanageably large, and then (oh! mention it not in Philistia) the back one will be the chief bed-room, with the venerable four-poster; and all above will certainly be roosting perches, only while the children are young, the large, cheerful back-attic, with its broad small-paned window and its prospect of red tiles and scanty trees, and a spire for the prominent feature, will be called "the nursery." For when a place has two uses it must have two names, and why not use the best? Next door, perhaps, is a lodging-house. You can guess that by the long white lace curtains at all the front windows except those in the retirement of the gutter. You may also define its interior with the accuracy of a sybil. The parlours and the large back attic are rented by two gentlemen from the City—foreigners most likely, for most natives of even their

moderate position have sundry sulky and expensive prejudices which prevent them from sharing a sitting-room. The "first-floor" is a barrister, who has a piano of his own, and keeps an aquarium. The "second-floor" is a solicitor in chrysalis. First-floor and second-floor are not on friendly terms. Nay, there is a deadly feud between them. They have never exchanged a word, and their weapons of warfare are the accentuations of their steps on the stairs, and the way their bells ring at the same time, "second-floor's" loudest and longest, like the protest of a man who expects to be wronged. The front attic is divided, and the smaller division, that without a fireplace, is the private apartment of a solicitor's clerk, who "boards" in the kitchen with the landlady's family. It is generally a landlady in Bloomsbury; in fact, in most cases you may safely predicate there are two landladies—mother and daughter, sister, or aunt and niece, the one who is visible, and who negotiates all arrangements, always professing herself entirely subordinate to the Mysterious Unknown, so that any household regulation which does not suit a lodger is never her fault at all, and would be removed instantly, if she were the only party who had a voice in the matter. These alternate establishments, occasionally varied by the private residence of some Hebrew magnate of the Minories, compose Bloomsbury, long deserted by Fashion, and now wistfully coquetting with Gentility, sorely tempted to go off to Villaopolis in the Metropolitan Railway. But there are some men, like my friend Chester, who will faithfully cling to the old place till the last.

Chester had never married. And he never told me why not. We did not know each other till we were

past forty, but, I can assure my young lady reader, that is not too old to make sentimental confidences. We grim old cronies don't sit over the fire till the small hours to talk of nothing else but politics. We may not use fine words, like "anguish," and "angelic," and "for ever." The romance in us has left off gushing, but shall we call it frozen—or crystallized? Nevertheless, I have heard Chester quoting poetry—very well, too, and a more chivalrous man I never knew. It could not have been poverty that hindered his marriage, for he made his modest professional success very early. There were two brothers Chester, the doctor was the elder. The other was in the army, and his portrait and his wife's hung in the drawing-room. I fear this brother was not a steady young man. I fancy there must have been something wrong about his marriage, for he and the doctor seem never to have met after it till the officer was a widower and dying. He left two children, Horace and Olive, and my friend adopted them both, and brought them up and furnished them with a home in the house in Bloomsbury, till Horace, a young spark in the War Office, discovered that it was an inconvenient locality for his attendance at West-End evening parties, and accordingly migrated to Onslow Square.

Olive Chester remained with her uncle. At the time of my Christmas visit she was about twenty-three years of age, a tall girl, with what certain people call "a good style" about her. That is to say, she looked as if she never did anything, and some people have a curious logic that whatever is useless is probably ornamental. Now I like nice young girls, and my sister Ruth says I stretch this definition so wide that it includes nearly all of them. But I

did not look on Olive Chester as any pleasant ingredient in my sojourn at her uncle's house. All the lines in her face went down, except her eyebrows, and they were painfully elevated. In any other home I think she would have acted invalid. I believe she had tried it once or twice, but her uncle had plainly told her that he knew better, and that nothing ailed her but selfish idleness, and he had suggested many ways whereby she might remedy this disease. Olive had evaded them all for the time, and made no more physical excuses for her depressions, and, indeed, kept herself as much as possible from Chester's notice. Perhaps it was supine on his part not to carry out a radical cure. But I am quite ready to grant that his was not a strong nature. He could cut off the tops of weeds, nobody could cut quicker and sharper, but his was not the firm, determined hand that attacks the root and pulls it up. Further, as regarded intimate connections, he had lived a lonely life, and had acquired habits of watching human nature without thought of active interference. I think there was a little unconscious cynicism in his apparent complacency. He liked a sly laugh at what he thought the harmless frailties of humanity, not being like Ruth, who is never sure what is harmless, and who I have known to trace intimate connection between an untidy dress and a divorce suit.

Olive was specially gloomy that Christmas-tide. Her uncle prepared me for this by pulling a comic long face, and announcing "that I must have patience with one who was drinking the very dregs of existence. Christmas is Olive's time of torture, Garrett, her season for remembering the times that are no more, and the happi-

ness that can never return. She had an offer of marriage one Christmas, and she refused it! I'll tell you who it was, Garrett. It was young Milman, who used to be my assistant, and a clever young fellow too. But providence forbade a young lady of 'Olive's position' (*sic*, as editors put in parenthesis), from marrying a man who could offer no better establishment than a six-roomed house and one maid-servant. Ever since, of course it would be highly unreasonable for me to protest against a state of lamentation which I can only faintly describe as both chronic and acute. In the early days of the grievance, with some feeble masculine notion of setting things to rights, I ventured to inquire if it was her refusal that she regretted. My only reward was a flood of tears, and a series of sobbing reflections on the unjust fate that bestows wealth on fat widowers like Sir Nicholas Biggs, vulgar boors like Mr. Stopper the dry-goods merchant, and poor old fogies like my everlasting crony, Mr. Garrett, while nice young men, with handsome faces, and heaps of brains—especially shown in a partiality to ourselves!—have not a shilling except what they earn, and mothers depending upon them into the bargain. I then timidly tried a few remarks on the law of compensation, and the impossibility of getting everything one would like. But Olive interrupted that she could not have acted otherwise than she had done, and that she must go down to her grave a blighted woman, which I silently thought to be a great pity, particularly for other people, since, however blight may enjoy its own misery, it is not a pleasant neighbour."

I was certainly very glad when another guest arrived. This was Bertha Buchan, a second orphan niece of Dr.

Chester, the daughter of a sister who had married a poor man, and had left this girl and two younger brothers wholly unprovided for. If their uncle's means had been as large as his heart, he would have adopted them too, but under the circumstances he was obliged to be content with extending to them a loving but limited protection. So Bertha Buchan was a teacher in a Blackheath boarding-school. Dr. Chester knew the art which shows pathos by contraries, and he gave me a playful sketch of her life.

"Her duties are everything all day long," he said. "Her expectations are her holidays here. Her relaxation is to walk sentinel by the column of girls, and snatch the benefit of air and exercise as well as she can with the proprieties of eighteen skittish fillies resting on her conscience. Her trouble is a certain letter that never comes from a certain young man, who went abroad because he was a failure at home, or, according to her version, 'because he was too good for the people he was among.' Her only leisure from term to term is Sunday afternoon. Then her brothers Ben and Bob walk over from London, and meet her in Greenwich Park. Only on fine Sundays, of course. But then they call every Sunday fine. Now, however, will be Bertha's golden time, for she'll see those two dear boys every day, either here or at their lodgings (they're good enough lads, Garrett, but roughish). And she will enjoy the inexpressible satisfaction of overhauling their wardrobes, and supply any blanks therein from her own little purse—slyly!—because Ben looks so queer whenever he knows she spends half-a-crown on him instead of herself, as if she does not enjoy the former performance a great deal more, and as if she

has not a right to do what she will with her own, especially after such extravagance as she has permitted herself lately. The peculiarity is that Bertha has always just committed some startling extravagance. Such as a ten-penny flower to brighten her last year's bonnet, or two pairs of gloves as first and second best, not to mention a pair of cloth gauntlets for wet days, and after dark! My! Garrett, but what selfish brutes we men are!"

Bertha came on Christmas Eve. She looked quite short and plump beside stalky Olive, otherwise I don't think she was very short or very plump. A bright, healthy girl, with very unclassic features, and wavy brown hair. "Wavy was not the right word for it," Olive remarked, while Bertha went to take off her bonnet, and reduce the lively locks to something like order, "for it was positively curly—like a boy's—just like her odious brother Ben's."

Early that same evening Horace Chester arrived. He did not very often visit Bloomsbury, though Dr. Chester told me that he always kept a seat for him when he gave a dinner to his professional friends. "Horace," said the doctor, "has an aristocractic air, an aristocratic toilet, and, I fear, an aristocratic bill at the Burlington Arcade, and at Poole's."

The young gentleman took very little notice of Bertha, for he had a critical eye, as far as it went, and could see that her dress had been unprofessionally made, also that her face had too much colour, and her manner too little repose. But Bertha herself was very glad to see him, for she was a friendly little being, and besides she only saw him once a year, and that sight meant Christmas Eve.

He had brought a gift for his sister. He produced it

while Bertha was absent,—down in the kitchen, paying seasonable congratulations to the cross old cook. When she returned, Olive was just trying it on. It was an onyx necklace ; and the young lady was regretting that, "as her best winter dress was black velvet, it would not show to advantage, though in itself it was sufficiently pretty." When Olive took it off, Bertha held it up beside the lamp, and turned it about, and exclaimed so enthusiastically, and enjoyed it so heartily, that Horace looked up at her for a moment, and I fancied his critical eye caught a glimpse of something more than the old-fashioned dress.

"You're always delighted with anything, Bertha," said Olive. "It's a pity there isn't somebody trying to please you, for it wouldn't be hard!" It was said with a sneer —the greatest and truest compliments often are.

"Oh, there will be somebody someday!" Bertha returned cheerfully.

"You are going to have everything nice someday ; aren't you?" pursued Olive, mocking.

"Well, I hope so," said Bertha.

And I thought she might safely hope so. Only perhaps—perhaps—there might first be an angel's touch, and a twilight passage over a river!

Ben and Bob arrived presently—demure and prim, in deference to their stylish cousins Chester ; and a few minutes after, the footboy brought in a clothes-basket full of holly,—and other Christmas vegetation. At the sight thereof Olive sighed, and shaded her face with her hand, and shuffled on her chair, intending thereby to signify the uneasiness of her heart.

"Our young ladies always put up the decorations themselves" said the doctor, with a significant wink.

"Bertha may—I can't positively," gasped Olive. "I don't see what people want with holly. It just stirs up all sorts of pathetic associations and———"

"But then I'm sure you enjoy the stirring, Olive," interrupted her uncle. "Well, Bertha, fall to work, and make the lads help you."

"I've had twenty-three Christmases, and I have put up holly for seventeen of them, so I ought to be experienced," observed Bertha, laughing. But the laugh died out a little suddenly. Perhaps she thought of her own old home, where, with an ailing father and sickly children, money had been so scarce that they might often have had no holly except the little sprig which greengrocers give "in" with the Christmas vegetables. But father and mother and little lame sister had all got to the best "someday" now, and so the cloud was gone in a moment, and she joked and laughed as she put up the decorations.

Gradually the fun warmed. Even Horace actually joined Ben in handing the boughs to Bertha as she stood poised on a hassock, a stool, and a chair, placed one above the other.

"Wouldn't it be better—aw—if I went up, aw ——" I heard him inquire. "It looks—aw—fearful to see you in such a position."

"Oh, thank you; but I enjoy it," answered Bertha. And Ben observed that Bertha never turned giddy.

Meantime, the doctor and Bob had been fastening something to the chandelier, and when it proved to be a twig of mistletoe, then the fun grew fast and furious and Bertha was kissed over and over again by her uncle and brothers, and even by Horace Chester, first-class clerk in

the Knapsack Department, War Office. I think he could hardly believe it of himself when he had done it, and ever since I have noticed that his polite physiognomy breaks into quite a pleasant smile at the very name of Bertha Buchan, who somehow gave him a revelation of a way in the world, where one may absolutely be happy, although not in the fashion.

Rat-tat. It was the last post. The footboy brought in seven letters. In Bertha's eyes I saw a hope that in such a feast there might be a crumb for herself! If not The Letter, at least a letter from some school-girl, smitten with affectionate remembrance of her good-natured teacher. Horace read them out. Two for Dr. Chester, one for Edward Garrett, Esq.; four for Miss Chester. Before her face had time to look disappointed, Bertha was lost in innocent delight over the pretty enclosures that Olive displayed. One, a nice long letter ("hand-writing feminine," muttered the doctor), with a prosperous robin at the top; another, a Christmas hymn wreathed in holly; the third, a Rimmel's almanack for the coming year; the fourth, an illuminated text—not printed, but delicate handiwork—from which Bertha read, in her sweet, serious tones, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

The doctor looked at the envelope. I caught a glimpse of it. The direction was in a queer upright print-like writing—apparently a disguised hand. I could not tell what he thought of it, but Olive noticed the movement, caught up the wrapper, gazed tragically upon it, and popped it into her reticule with dramatic energy.

In due time Ben and Bob went their ways, and the

young ladies retired to their own room. Horace lingered with us old gentlemen just a little longer.

"Bertha is looking very well," said he.

"She always is," returned his uncle.

"And she's a—aw—jolly little woman," Horace went on. "To see her with that necklace, I was really sorry I had not something for her too, only, you see it comes —aw—expensive, for though I really think she would be pleased with—aw—imitation coral, yet it would not be fitting in me to give such—aw—present. And now, good night, uncle, and good night, Mr. Garrett, and I wish you both all the correct—aw—seasonable wishes."

"Does not Mr. Chester reappear to-morrow?" I inquired when he was gone.

"No," said the doctor; "he always spends Christmas Day at the villa of a colleague higher in office than himself, who has a very charming sister. Horace half fancies himself in love with her, but not being quite sure, has never yet got further than a state of semi-idiocy while in her presence. And now, Garrett, I hope that you are aware that a tragedy is being enacted under this very roof. I know what is going on in the second-floor back bedroom as well as if I were there. Enter my two nieces. Olive sinks into a chair; holds out an envelope; exclaims, 'Why am I tortured by these conjectures! He would never communicate with me again—unless—but such vain hopes are worse than hopelessness! And yet that is like his capital 'C'—and he always puts a colon after the name! Oh, Bertha, it is so hard to endure!' Bertha stands opposite—sympathetic; does not even know that a thought floats through her mind that suspense concerning a rejected lover who must reasonably

be supposed to have banished one from his memory, can't be quite so trying as the silence of one from whom you have parted—oh, so lovingly! But Olive has such sensitive feelings! Of course, Bertha hasn't. What associations can Christmas have for Bertha? It is not much of a Christmas memory that once HE came to morning service at Bloomsbury Church, and sat behind a pillar wreathed with holly and laurel, and conveniently believing that I was blind, shook hands with her in the porch."

"You did not invite him here?" I said, pitying the poor starved little loving-making so tenderly kept alive on the very light food of fond imaginations.

"No, Garrett, no," returned the doctor. "I am not a fiend, though I am a bachelor, and for my own part I have no high views of the 'position' of either of my neices; but still I should decidedly scout a hopeful suitor with eighty pounds a year, and no prospects in the world or in himself! Well, she'll not see him in Bloomsbury Church this year. And between you and I, I hope he won't write to her, and I hope she'll forget all about him."

Next morning Olive came down to breakfast very blighted indeed,—quite miserable to behold. We all went to church together, and there she kept down her veil, and didn't stand up at singing-time, and sighed away the sermon. At home she sat at the festive board like a memento of misery, and could not bear the piano to be opened, so that "the boys" had none of the music they liked so much and heard so seldom. Indeed, Bertha feared it was altogether dull work for them, but she herself did her best, and could not help the comparative failure.

Dear little Bertha! she sincerely enjoyed her holidays. It was such a treat not to teach, and correct, and chide, as if oneself was the standard of everything, but to feel like a girl at home, and to be free for those kindly little duties which awaken smiles and cheerfulness. Bertha was one of those women who find duties wherever they go. Which was one reason why she never grumbled at having "no time for herself" like the other teacher at the Blackheath boarding-school. It was pleasing herself to serve others. She found her uncle's maid, Mary, excited and fretful in an unsuccessful struggle to trim a cap to take to her mother on New Year's-day. In an hour the cap was finished, as Mary said, "beautiful, and mother 'll be so proud to hear you did it, miss." She made herself her uncle's right hand. He took her to see one or two of his juvenile patients, and he declared that she deserved the fees for curing them with her bright face and merry stories. She went out every evening with her brothers—braving possible snow-storms, with skirts tucked up *a la Watteau*, and a great plaid shawl over her waterproof cape. "She doesn't mind what guy she makes herself," Olive said. They went to see the Houses of Parliament by moonlight, and the torch-light skating on the Serpentine, and every other sight that cost nothing but a walk. And during that visit, Ben cast a cynical skin that had been creeping over his fine honest nature, and began to comprehend that true charity must have a little patience with Horace Chester's fopperies and Olive Chester's "feelings," as well as with the failings of the poor drunken cobbler who tried so hard to reform, or the dishonesty of the street boy who snatched a loaf to take to his sick mother. And in the

course of a discussion we had, the little woman dropped a remark which I saw made a very deep impression on merry Bob—"that the better one grew the happier one became, and that if anybody were dull, that person might be good, but could not be very good."

But Christmas holidays must have an end, and Bertha's closed very prematurely. The Blackheath governess requested her to return on the second of January, to keep house while she herself went on a visit. Bertha consented without a moment's hesitation, and went off to pay a farewell visit to the only personal friend she had in London, an old fellow-teacher dying in the Consumption Hospital. She came back as bright as ever, though the brightness was like sunlight among showers. Then she packed her trifle of luggage, and cheerfully prepared to depart alone, for her uncle had an important engagement that afternoon, and the evening before Ben could not be sure whether he could be spared from his counting-house. How delighted she was when I offered my escort! I am not quite an old fool, and I knew how much to set down to her warm-heartedness; but if I had been a young man, I think I might been dangerously flattered! Ben rushed into the station just in time to get a last look of his sister.

"She's made Christmas for everybody," said he, as we watched the train which carried her away; "only I'm not sure whether she's had any for herself!"

When I returned to Bloomsbury, I saw the two women-servants giggling at the area window. The very page had a smirk on his serene face as he let me in. And at the other end of the hall there was the doctor himself, peeping out of his sanctum, smiling and wagging his head, and beckoning me towards him.

"We won't say a word about it," he whispered, as he closed the door upon us both; "nevertheless, we will keep our private opinion, that some people are great fools!"

"What has happened?" I asked, mystified.

"Here is Dr. Milman got a good birth of eight hundred a year," said the old gentleman, "and he has actually come back to ask Olive if he is good enough for her now! I should not wonder if she sends him away to get a thousand! But I hope she won't, for she has spoiled my digestion these two years, and I've had enough of it!"

That evening Olive had a long interview with her uncle. When it was over, I caught a vision of her running up-stairs, with her handkerchief held to her face. I think Dr. Chester had been speaking seriously to her. He looked very grave when I joined him, though he presently began to laugh it off.

"She has taken him, Garrett," said he, "so please to behave yourself, and wish us joy. Also she has found a new grievance. If she had but known the end from the beginning, her feelings might have been spared this terrible laceration, from which she does not believe her spirits will ever recover. And Dr. Milman himself is terribly changed. Why, his hair is iron-grey, and he has furrows on his forehead! It gave her quite a shock when he came in. And he is so grave and solemn! She can't connect him with the dear, handsome, light-hearted young man that he was. 'Oh, uncle, isn't it hard?' 'Olive,' I said, 'you are not worth Milman's grey hairs and lined brow, and only for his sake, now he has got you, I hope it will never please God to open his eyes to that truth.' Oh, Garrett, and our little Bertha would

spend her last farthing on a fatted calf if SOMEBODY came back, in rags, sunburnt and unshaven! But I suppose it would be too much like heaven, if such as Milman and Bertha married each other."

I left Bloomsbury only a few days afterwards, and did not see Chester again for some time. But when we met, I did not forget to inquire after Miss Buchan. The doctor had seen her only the day before. He had to visit a patient near Morden College, and so he called in at the school. "I took the liberty of asking her if The Letter had come yet," said he, "and she said, 'Yes,' she had found it on her return from the holidays. Nobody had thought of forwarding it. I told her a bit of my mind, Garrett, and she cried,—she did,—and at last she showed me this letter, to finally convince me what a nice young man HE is. It was not very long, though it began with 'dearest Bertha.' And it only said there seemed no better 'chance' for a fellow in Australia than in London, but he had a desk in a counting-house, where the work was not very hard, so he was comfortable enough himself, and he could assure her that she need not to fret about him. Only he wished some old relation would leave him a few hundreds, for there were some fine farms up the country, and the other day he saw a settler's little wife who reminded him so much of her. And he supposed she would spend Christmas in Bloomsbury as usual, and he hoped she would enjoy it, but she must not mix too much in festivities as if he were with her, and not out there, all by himself. And despite all I might say, Garrett, Bertha thanks God that yonder selfish pig has not forgotten her yet. But I think it is a pathetic thanksgiving offered with tearful eyes. Despite

her cheerful faith in 'someday,' I think it is dawning upon her that she and Somebody will never be more to each other. 'We've waited five years already,' she said, and it has not pleased God to help us to try life together: we are no further now than we were at the beginning.' It never strikes her that it is because it has pleased God to let her affections rise in one of those mysterious waste-floods whose Why we shall only know hereafter. She sent her love to Olive, and a message that she thinks she shall be able to have a holiday for the wedding. She does not envy Olive. And she need not. She has come far nearer to happiness in the dream that she clasps as the dearest bliss of her life, content to await its realisation 'someday'—over the River. She is one of those women who cannot fancy 'someday' without 'Somebody.' But if the magnet of her love cannot draw that heart to manly action on earth, Garrett, how shall it raise it to heavenward aspiration? Well, if it fail at last the Father will give her strength which He has not granted yet. I am sure the loving God will be pitiful to such as little Bertha—Someday. I only wish I was like her, Garrett!"

VI.

WALTER SEDLEY.

OUR house, Garrett, Giles & Co., enjoyed the possession of a square pew in the church of St. Aubyn's-by-the-Bridge. Before my own time I don't know who used it, for our housekeepers were generally Dissenters, and all our young men lodged too far away to care for a long walk citywards on Sundays. So when I became the resident partner, I had it all to myself. It was a pew which would hold at least ten—more if they were little ones, as some are likely to be in a family pew. I never felt lonelier than in that pew. Only fancy how different it might have been with five or six bonnie little children and a dear mother, finding their places and training them in good behaviour! It was quite sad to see all those comfortable hassocks that nobody ever kneeled upon, and the row of Bibles and Prayer-books that nobody ever used. If St. Aubyn's had been the church of some crowded central or suburban parish, I might have grown quite popular by filling my pew from the free seats. But except some alms-people there was nobody on the free seats at St. Aubyn's, save two old women who sat at either side of the stove, and warmed their shaking fingers when the other people were kneeling. A stranger needed only to peep in at the door—perhaps to see what sort of painted window we had—

and straightway Mrs. Dobbs the pew-opener invited him to lose himself in the commodious pew of Overbury Brothers or Nichols and White, neither of which had been claimed for time out of mind. There was really no chance to exercise the hospitable virtues at St. Aubyn's. It was a proud day for us when the bishop honoured our old clergyman by filling his pulpit one bright Sunday (I think they had made the engagement at the breakfast after the wedding of the bishop's cousin and the rector's niece). Then one had an opportunity to be civil and kindly. I opened my door for Mrs. Macy of the Benbow Dining Rooms, and Mr. Hummel the German tailor. Mrs. Macy was a nominal Dissenter, and Mr. Hummel was generally considered to be an infidel. But the bishop was an event which neither of them could withstand, and I was really sorry that it was not stronger diet which he had sweetened for them with his rank and lawn sleeves.

It was Christmas morning, about fifteen years ago. I seldom went to Mallowe for my Christmas. The firm generally had special business at that season, and I, as the old bachelor, thought it my duty to attend to it. Usually there was some stray new young clerk who was glad to accept a share in my turkey and a slice of my pudding. But that year, there was none. I could not help feeling that I was getting my best bit of Christmas when I was giving the "boxes" on Christmas Eve. There were many houses where I believed I should have been heartily welcome, but nobody had thought of inviting me because I was supposed to be extending my hospitality to the straggling sheep of my own fold.

It was a clear, keen, bright day. Of course, I would attend the morning service, and as I dressed, I tried to

put myself back into the days of my childhood. Then, Christmas had been a keen delight because of the holly in church, and the hymns, and the dainties for dinner. Why couldn't I be quite satisfied with these things now? Because my nature had risen above them? And then I thought to myself that, after all, I was as far below the real happiness of Christmas as ever. The Babe in the cradle of Bethlehem—was not He as much for me as for my partner Giles, with his good wife and six fine children? And yet somehow it seemed that even for the sake of that Babe, I did not like to be quite lonely on Christmas Day.

As I passed the little graveyard that lay beneath my own window, I peeped between the palings and wondered how the people there had kept Christmas in their time, and what difference it made to other people, when one by one those forgotten graves were first filled. For a simple girl-name on an old tombstone in Mallowe had made all the difference to me! And then I walked down Garden Street, and saw that the chemist had fresh curtains hung at his parlour window. And at another door there was a well-dressed, pleasant-looking youth making a double knock. Ah, well! And I turned into Benbow Place.

There was a young man standing at the corner. I looked at him, for in that place, except during business hours, there was seldom anybody whom I did not know sufficiently for a salutation, especially just as St. Aubyn's scanty congregation was passing in. But this was a stranger. A tall young man. Not well dressed. Not shabby. His eyes met mine, and there was something in his expression that caught my mind, and puzzled it, and

I went on trying to make it out. It was not exactly reckless, it was not wholly unhappy. It was a peculiar mingling of those two frames—and of something else. When I reached the church steps, I looked back. He was still standing there. I felt sure he was not waiting for anybody. He had no overcoat, nor yet any of those wrappers with which the hardier or thriftier content themselves. In a milder season, he would have passed for a well-to-do youth, a little careless in his toilet arrangements. But, as it was, there was something about him which said, plainly enough, that he would make no double-knock at any door that Christmas Day. It struck me sadly that he was lonelier than myself. Some people in my position might have already cheered themselves with the reflection that there would be many who would be very glad of their society, if one only knew where to find them. That never cheers me. It seems to me the most pitiful fact of this life, that what is wasted on the one hand may be wanted on the other. "If my little Lucy had lived, and we two had married, we might have had a son who would have been just his age," I said to myself. Ah, if! I turned again to the church-door, but something seemed pulling me back. What had made me notice that young man? What had made me feel that he was sorrowful and tried? However watchful we may strive to be, depend on it we do not notice all that are so. Christ would not have blamed the priest and the Levite if they had passed the wounded man in the dark, and had never known he was there. It was because they "looked on him," and yet "passed by on the other side." I might say this young man was nothing to me. But then they might have said the same. Probably they

thought so; and truthfully, for was not the reward of the good Samaritan's loving-kindness just the acquisition of the sweet rights of friendship and neighbourhood? I turned once more, and went back to the corner. It was done in such a minute—so impulsively— that I had touched his shoulder before I knew what I meant to say. Better so. He looked round at my tap, and before I could even speak, there was a change in his face that took away all fear of repulsion. I only said—

"My boy, won't you join in our church servive this Christmas morning?"

His eyes fell, and he simply answered, "Thank you," but he instantly moved towards St. Aubyn's, and we both went in together. I motioned him on to my pew. He sat down at a little distance from me, but not at the extreme end of the seat—no farther off than any friend might sit. He gave one or two quick glances round, and then opened a Bible, but, somehow, I did not think he read. But as soon as the service began, he joined in, attentively enough, almost nervously attentive, as I have noticed many people to be when going through a once familiar duty which has grown strange.

He looked a gentleman. By that, I do not mean one who had never done handiwork or known the want of money. I mean rather one who is aware that there is somebody else in the world besides himself, and that they have rights and claims that he respects. If some may think, at first blush, that this definition scarcely includes all the meaning of the word gentleman, they may see more of its force, by reflecting that a vulgar person cannot be better described than by the slang phrase "thinking himself everybody." But at the same time, this

young man's manner had also that "chasing," which satisfies many people, whether the metal be worth it or no. He moved quietly. He had a refined accent (for once or twice he joined in the responses), and his whole bearing had that character which simple country-folk often call the "nobleman look." And he had a noble face. Nature had made him in her grand style. But, alas! it was a nobility fallen. Fallen into the blacker pits that lie unguarded beside the rugged and shady path where we all follow Father Adam as he stepped down from the light and safety of Paradise. If it had not been such a noble face, it would scarcely have told the sad story so plainly. You saw what it might have been, by what it still was, in all its ruin. And despite the lines that passion had drawn before time had opportunity (he could not have been more than twenty-three), and despite the blur of sensuality upon the finer outlines, there was enough left in that face to touch the heart of any fatherly man or good woman. And I thought, if I and my little Lucy had married, and had a son, suppose he had looked like that, and had sat so, in a stranger's pew on Christmas morning!

Service over, he did not attempt to hurry off with a civil bow, as I half fancied he would. He did not even stir until I made a motion to depart. I am ashamed to say, that during the service, notwithstanding my increasing interest in him, I had had sundry doubts about my course of conduct. It was not respectable to pick up with strangers in the street. It was not prudent to form acquaintances with people of whose antecedents one knew nothing. My nerves even ran low enough to recall sundry burglaries and such-like, supposed to have been promoted

by similar rash associations. I had then stolen a glance at my fellow-worshipper, and had concluded there was no such danger in this case—that is if my instincts stood me in any stead at all. But if not? Why, then, nobody would sympathise with me, but everybody would say that I was only served richly right! I had then arrived at the feeble-minded conclusion that nobody could blame me for anything I had done as yet—though it was more than most people would have done,—and that, after all, none could estimate the benefit that the youth might derive, even from such a passing notice, followed by the hallowed influence of the service. I would wish him a friendly good-morning, and be done with him, doubtless to our mutual relief. But when he sat still, till I myself arose, and when he lingered in the aisle till I followed, then I felt that uncomfortable sensation which we have when we stop to pity a starving dog, and then growing statistical and social-scientific, remember that we cannot be expected to feed all the starving dogs in the world, and march off,—but with the aroused animal behind us, dumbly urging our pity back upon us, and refusing to believe in our hard-heartedness, till there is nothing for us to do, but to put our political economy in our pocket and go in search of a tripe-shop! The young man turned and looked at me. He made no further advance. If I went my way, he would go his. The look said he did not expect me to speak. He did not suppose that I would. Only I might, and if so, he was ready! He let me pass him in the aisle. Even then I had not made up my mind what I should do. But in the outer porch I paused, and when I heard his step behind me, I turned briskly, and remarked (very originally), that it was fine, seasonable weather.

"Yes, indeed," he said, with a half-smile. Last night I was looking at the Christmas pictures in the shops, and it struck me that none of the artists have courage to depict Father Christmas in the black, slushy robe that he wears nine times out of ten."

"No," I said, blindly carrying on the conversation; "it seems to be an artistic necessity to the comfort of Christmas within, that there should be snow and ice without."

We had crossed Benbow Place, and at the corner of Garden Street, he half paused, remembering that was the turning whence I had come.

"I am not in any hurry to go home," I said. "Which way do you take?"

"Any way will suit me," he answered, simply. Whether there was any bitterness in his reply, I could not tell. At least, it was not melodramatically displayed. So we both walked on till we got into one of the more important thoroughfares running parallel with the Thames.

I can never distinctly recall the exact way in which we drifted into conversation. I remember many things that we touched upon—the half-deserted churches that we passed, the lower strata of metropolitan industrial life, the charities of the season, and so forth. This stray companion of mine talked well, and though there was a shadow on his manner other than the becoming diffidence of a young man towards an elder, still there was a strong flavour of originality about him. He was made of the materials of great men, however tangled they might be at present. The acquaintance which he had of the intricacies of city-turnings excused me in asking if he lived in London.

"No," he answered, and then he told me his name,

which was Walter Sedley, and mentioned as his birthplace a country town, but one so near London that, if that giant continues its present rate of growth, a few years from the present time will make it quite suburban.

"Have you any friends here?" I ventured to ask.

"No friends at all," he said, with a marked emphasis on the noun, which led me to think that he had connections of some sort which he did not include in that description.

"Then you are like me, spending a lonely Christmas," I remarked. But he did not seem to notice that pointed observation.

Our walk had finally led us back to the little graveyard under my windows, and I signified that I had reached home. "Suppose you come home and dine with me?" I suggested, rather nervously. "It will make things more cheerful for us both."

He looked at me, and though there were no tears in his blue eyes, still they meant tears. "It is very good of you to be so hospitable, sir," he said, "but how can I accept it? I am the merest stranger, with no claim——"

"Tut, my boy," I said, quite eagerly now, "you'll live yourself to be so angry when 'no claims' are flung up in your face when you want to please yourself by doing a kindly action. Come in, and don't make any bother about it, else I shall hope you may be grandly punished in the same way some day!"

He did not say another word, not even a "thank you," as he followed me up the dark corkscrew staircase, where, I think, he almost stumbled once or twice. There was a burst of cheerful comfort when I opened my sitting-room door—for it was a dull day, and the blinds were drawn,

and the gas lit, and the fire ablaze, and the table bright with snowy linen and such modest display of china and silver as may grace a bachelor's repast. To be sure, an old porter was my only attendant for the day. He was passing out as we went in, and I directed him to get another plate. And then I bustled up to the fire-place, calling upon my guest to come and warm himself, and make himself quite at home.

There was no response. I turned and saw him seated in a corner of the sofa, with his face buried in the pillows. And there was a dead silence till he heard the old porter fiddling with the handle of the door, and then he sprang up, and stood beside me on the rug, with the struggle of strongly repressed emotion on his countenance.

We had rather a quiet dinner. Whatever might be the skeleton of my young companion's life, it had peeped through somewhat too plainly to be altogether ignored, but I alluded to nothing beyond the most ordinary topics, till the last vestige of the meal was cleared away, and we had drawn up our chairs beside the hearth.

"My boy," I said, "it is now my turn to say that I am a stranger, and have no claim upon your confidence. But I cannot help feeling that there must be some reason why one like you is thus lonely so near your native place. I don't think you are happy. I repeat that I am aware a few hours of pleasant companionship give me no right to make these remarks. But if you think it might help you to open your mind to one who must view things with a stranger's dispassionate eyes, my best counsel and comfort are at your disposal. If you think otherwise, I ask your pardon for a well-meant intrusion."

He sat quite quiet, gazing at the fire. I saw that he could not speak. The struggle between feeling and reserve was going on again. Presently it struck me that it might help him if I made a gradual way for his confidence by a few simple questions, which he might answer shortly or fully, as returning calmness and inclination would permit.

"You are not offended?" I said gently.

"I—thank you," he answered.

"And you are not happy?"

He shook his head with the quick, tortured motion of an animal when it is struck.

"Have you been long in London?" I asked presently.

"Only since—yesterday morning," he replied.

"And did you leave home then?" I inquired.

"Such home as I have," he answered, suddenly gaining a desperate calmness. "I am a married man, sir."

He was not what is called young-looking for his age, but as he uttered these portentous words, he did look dolefully boyish. The sad story came out little by little. Some particulars I did not learn till a later period. Walter Sedley's father had been an affluent mercantile man. His family had consisted of two sons, Walter being the younger. Their childhood had been spent with their parents in that little country town, and Walter's voice trembled as he spoke of the old home, and the rustic bench in the orchard where their mother used to teach them their hymns, with the fair Surrey hills stretching before them, or in later times, of the winter Sunday afternoon Bible-readings, in which the whole family joined, verse about, in primitive fashion. From all I could gather of Walter's parents, I should think

they were simple, good people, perhaps not acute, doctrinal Christians, haply not quite able to obey prompt St. Peter's exhortation to be ready to answer "every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you," but to the vital test, "By their fruits shall ye know them," rendering the unfeigned response of "patient continuance in well-doing." However, though they lived long enough to print in their children's hearts an undying memory of goodness and happiness, they died, just when, in many senses, their sons needed them most. Very nearly together they died. The mother had long been an invalid; but some attempt on her husband's part to keep up business by day and vigils by night, brought on a sudden illness which carried him off first, where she was not slow to follow. At the time of this double bereavement, the lads were aged respectively seventeen and fifteen. In this world's goods, they were well provided for, as each might expect about nine thousand pounds, if everything in the business was fully realised. They were left to the sole guardianship of their father's only brother, a man who had showed himself sufficiently shrewd and capable in his own career. Whether this uncle lacked feelings of conscientious responsibility, and made experiments in speculation with his dead brother's money, or whether it was but the natural consequence of proxy management, both business and capital swiftly dwindled down during the years of their minority. Yet I don't think this was the chief cause of the bitterness that I could see Walter Sedley felt towards his uncle and his uncle's family.

It is certainly no sinecure to be a guardian,— as distinguished from the mere professional trustee who dis-

charges his duty by simple honesty. A guardian assumes personal relations towards his wards, which from some inherent barrier in their organization, may sometimes only prove the more disastrous to both, the more earnestly they are carried out. He is invested with parental authority unsoftened by the spell of parental affection. In most cases he has children of his own, and has to steer himself between considering the strangers too much, only because they are strangers, or his own children, just because they are his own. In such a case, a warmly-feeling, tender-hearted Christian man may, by the help of God, keep his conscience clear, and his hands clean; but a worldling will be sure to fail.

In the first instance, Harry and Walter Sedley took up their abode in their uncle's house. The family were all older than them, the youngest boy being just one year a-head of Harry. There were two or three daughters, young women from twenty to twenty-five years of age, and though it is natural to suppose that the sisterless orphans had first approached them with all the interest and admiration of novelty and inexperience, yet they had so effectually crushed this out, that Walter spoke of them only with sheer contemptuous dislike, and I could not doubt they had indirectly done their full share of mischief by lowering the whole tone of his moral being. I could understand they were by no means a united family, and that the sisters had a sinister delight when they could catch a flirtatious triumph over each other. But it is just such people who are most skilful in combining to make their relationship a torment to outsiders, especially as it can be done so insidiously, that if the outsider cry out with the pain it simply proves

ill-temper and bad feeling. There was one brother from home, married, and the orphans seemed to find their first friend in his poor little wife, whose temper and energies, however, were slowly souring and withering under the infinitesimal poisoned thrusts and side slights which, for her husband's sake, she had to bear in silence. There were other brothers still at home, and the elder of these, Dick, a careless young man of two-and-twenty, was the only one of the household who did not give the orphans very distinctly to understand that they were most unwelcome intruders.

I can well realize what life in such a home must have been. A good many visitors, but nothing of the warmth and light of genuine friendship—joyless gaiety, and the vitality of family intercourse kept up by stinging pricks rather than healthy friction. The two brothers had continued in their affection to each other, but before long, Walter became aware that Harry and their cousin Dick had confidences in which he did not share. Dick and his father were never on very good terms. Dick had not fallen into the groove which his father had made for him, and was not unjustly considered the black sheep of the family. As years passed on, Walter himself was admited to some of the intimacy between his brother and their cousin. It was certainly rather too much to expect a youth to sit at home night after night with some female relative in a sore temper because not included in the invitation which had carried her sisters out. He was glad of any change. And if he started back from some of the scenes to which Dick and Harry led him, he was soon convinced by Dick's specious sophistry, that after all, they were no more sinful than Ellen's persistent selfishness or Martha's mali-

cious scandal. An unhappy, lonely young heart is not quick to see that because one evil is not worse than another evil it does not become a good. And so he was drawn into a course of life which for a time made the hymns learned in sight of the Surrey hills, and the winter Sunday-afternoon Bible-readings fade as faint and distant as the stars when the sky reddens with some fierce conflagration.

He did not at once go quite the lengths of the other two. And just when Harry came of age, there was a time of difficulty and exposure and disgrace. Fierce words ran high between the old man and his son and his ward. The whole family were ready to lay all the blame on Harry—on Harry, too haughty and hot-spirited to return that his younger years and unfortunate position rendered him far more likely to be the misled than the misleader. Dick was ready enough to acknowledge this privately to either of his cousins,—Dick would not actively have excused himself at Harry's expense. But Dick was an inbred cowardly sinner. His own idle ideal of comfort was worth more to him than anything else, in this world or elsewhere. And he tacitly accepted his family's defence of him, when he found that it was the gloss they intended to put upon their condonation of his, the wolf's share of blame, while they sent out the scapegoat into the wilderness, to perish or not, just as might happen.

Harry was paid his diminished patrimony, out of which slender remains there would indeed be but little left after he had satisfied the money-lenders into whose hands he had fallen. And he was told to leave his uncle's house—a command he was by no means disinclined to obey.

The solemn triumph with which Harry's downfall was eagerly promoted, coupled with the coddling sympathy and succour extended to the slyly-grinning Dick, stirred all the fire in Walter's nature. Walter knew that Harry had sinned deeply enough, but not as deeply as Dick. His sense of justice was outraged. And so closely do the good and evil dwell together in our natures, that he no sooner saw the greater sinner escape scot free, than he became ready to deny any culpability in the minor offender. If Harry was turned out, he would not stay. Where Harry went, he would go too. And so he did.

They both came to London. Until his majority, Walter, of course, had an allowance from his uncle, and aided by his dead father's good name in the commercial world, he soon got an easy and rather lucrative post in a house of business, where, when he came into his own money, he might hope for something more permanent and independent. Harry, who had hitherto found employment under his uncle, now called himself "on the look-out." Very likely he thought himself sincere. Walter never doubted it. But races and cricket-matches, and dog-fancying, and opera-nights, are not happy elements in a young man's success in life. The brothers had to leave one or two lodgings because Harry's hours and habits did not suit quiet-going people. Walter felt his brother had been somewhat unfairly used, and in the warmth of his devotion followed him blindly. Harry got to the last of his fortune, and carried on his expensive habits on credit, until Walter was induced to draw upon his own expectations to save his brother from jail. When such a thing is done once, it has generally to be done over and over again, until at last, instead of the eternal

gratitude which Harry had vowed when he received the first instalment, he would have deemed a denial to be an absolute injury. This went on, till Walter himself attained his majority, and in a cold formal interview with his uncle, received his legacy, signed a full release, and that same evening dolefully paid away every pound to the expectant money-lenders.

Of course their absolute impecuniosity did not stop Harry from still running into debt, which now naturally ended in his running away. The two brothers had kept on affectionate terms till the last, despite such occasional fierce collisions as their reckless, dissipated life rendered almost certain. I could tell that it was still a sharp pang to Walter that this brother of his had left him without any other announcement than his disappearance. He did not think Harry could have meant to stay away, he said, though certainly Harry had often been very unlike himself for some time before he went.

At the time of this sudden separation, they were living in a showy lodging-house near the Vauxhall Bridge Road. The landlady had been a comic actress at one of the lower theatres, and was quite ready to make a coarsely pitying allowance for the miseries of her lodgers, and was even not impatient for her money so long as she might expect it at last. Not a bad-natured woman that woman must have been, only her poor womanly virtues had been thrown into the gutter, and so befouled and betrodden that it was not altogether easy to know them from vices. For immediately after Harry went away, Walter fell ill, and lay for some weeks less than half-conscious, with no attendants but his sluttish landlady and her smart niece, —a barmaid out of place.

They must have done their best by him, or he could not have struggled through. I daresay they looked in his desk, and reassured themselves by the names and addresses of his respectable connections; but then, poor things, they had not your nice, well-bred sense of honour, dear young lady reader, and they were risking a great deal for the likes of them, and were facing the baker's duns, and the butcher's insolence, to wrest a little more food to supply the half-dying prodigal within their gates. I never heard the landlady's name. But the barmaid was called Emma. I daresay she used to read the penny weekly journals, and felt herself like the heroine of their eighty-chaptered stories. I can fancy the days of Walter's convalescence. The gaudy, lonely room. The weakened nerves, the softened heart, the aching sense of separation from the happy days of hymn-learning in the orchard looking out on the Surrey hills. And the girl—a fair girl—gliding in and out, neater and prettier than in what she considered her palmier days, because she had not time to titivate her golden locks, nor money to spare for pink ribbons and pinchbeck jewelry. I can realize his want of somebody to confide in, the yearning of some soul to touch his, however blindly. And the girl would be kind and gentle—even a little touched, by a vague consciousness that she was becoming something very different to him than to the "gentlemen" who raved about her pretty eyes, and talked nonsense to her over their claret and bitter beer. And gradually, in his groping after sympathy, Walter would stumble into a theory that it was wiser to take the nearest, when one might despair of the best, forgetting that lofty aspiration is better than low attainment. And soft words would be whispered,

and a promise given and taken, and then (despite the back account of rent, and the pawn-tickets that she knew all about, in what poor Walter thought his secret drawer) the sluttish landlady would talk grandiloquently to her neighbours, and make tempting hints about some mysterious preferment coming to her "Emmy."

They did not marry at once—not for some months after. Not before Walter had got quite well, and had taken another very inferior situation in a counting-house, where, nevertheless he again mixed with respectable men, and caught glimpses of well-bred, and ladylike women, their female connections. Not before he had seen Emmy in her glory, with curls half a yard long, and a blue dress with a scarlet sash. Not before they had gone through many a tiffing and crying, because he reproved her for the way she spoke, and was not exactly prepared to walk out with her on Sunday afternoon, curls, dress, sash, and all. Not, in fact, until, in the same gaudy sitting-room where the interesting convalescent had once spoken such sweet words, there was a very ugly scene between the landlady, Emmy, and himself, wherein the landlady called him some very plain names, all the more unpleasant because they applied, and used some very pointed threats, which were not as weighty as they might have been, since he had not a penny to be mulcted in, nor any social circle to be disgraced before—while Emmy stood aside, and whimpered, and put him in mind of some things that had happened while he was ill. Emmy's tears, and her poor ungrammatical remembrances, carried their point to a spot in his soul which the abuse and threats could not reach. And next day he put up the banns, and in three weeks they were married.

One of those melancholy weddings when the clergyman looks sorrowful, and the pew-opener tosses up her head, and gives "the hussy" to understand that she knows all about her!

His earnings were miserably inadequate for the new claims upon them. One day he happened to come across an old business associate of his father's. The gentleman knew that the young Sedleys had not turned out well, and that this one had made an imprudent marriage. But he was sorry to see his old friend's son looking so miserable, and in the course of a few weeks he wrote to him offering him a place in the counting-house of a factory not far from Walter's birthplace. It was trying to think of going back to the old innocent scenes, but the salary was a little higher, and expenses would be less, and it struck Walter that his wife might improve if taken away from her old coarse associations and her vixen-tongued aunt. So thither the two migrated, and there they had lived together till the morning before I saw him standing forlorn in Benbow Place.

"I don't know how it was; I seemed to turn wild," he said, drearily. "Emma is never pleased. She has been used to so much strong excitement. Poor girl! she may well reproach me. We have been just a curse to each other. She is angry with me because she gets less dress and going about, where she hoped for more, and then I have turned upon her, and said I could more easily retrieve everything else than my marriage with her. I've come to be unmanly enough to say that to a woman—my wife! She was nagging me yesterday morning, and I rushed out of the house, and took the train here. I thought I'd relieve her of my presence, and work my way

abroad somewhere. If I could get any money I could send it to her."

"That is not all the duty of a husband and a father," I said, but as gently as ever I could.

"No, that it isn't," he responded heartily, "and last night as I was roaming about the streets, I came to a corner where a man was preaching. I stood still, because I'd nothing better to do, and because the very crowd seemed companionable. I heard what he had to say, but I did not attend—did not care a straw for anything till they began to sing a hymn—an old hymn, sir, I daresay you know it—

'Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armour on.'

It brought back the very look of the autumn afternoon when Harry and I had repeated it to mother. And after that there was a new meaning in all the preacher said. I always knew I'd been doing wrong, but my whole nature had been like a dark room, where one can't see half the disorder, and now it was like a light suddenly carried in! I don't know how I got through last night. I hired a room at a coffee-house. I went to bed, but I never closed my eyes. And I got up early, and went out and stood on London Bridge. Sir, I'll own it was only fear that kept me from jumping over, for I did not want anything then to prove to me there was Somewhere beyond the water! I don't know how long even that fear would have kept my brain from whirling round. I wonder what would have become of me if you hadn't spoken to me."

"The God that you had forgotten so long did not forget you," I said.

"No, 'while we are yet sinners'—the preacher said that," he murmured softly. "I've thought about religion sometimes. I've thought I'd try to mend my ways, and make myself good enough for it some day. I took the matter at the wrong end. No wonder I always let it drop!

'Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son.'

That's it. But it's wonderful how those seem mere words, a sort of form of speech, till that light comes in—just as a child might think a nut a tolerable plaything, and would never find any other meaning in it, till somebody cracks the shell, and gives him the kernel. If I'd only understood them before!"

"Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation," I urged.

There was a calm, softened look stealing over his face, giving it a beauty that was not its own.

"I'm afraid to say I do accept Christ's mercy!" he sighed.

"No need to say it. He knows what you feel," I said.

"Then I think He knows I want to accept it!" he exclaimed, with sudden energy. "But oh, my poor ruined life!—it is all too late to save it!"

"Not so," I said (I had some faithless doubts in my heart, but thank, God, He gave me strength not to utter them). "Not so. You cannot undo the past. But the future is yours. Your follies and sins have set you some hard duties, but surely not too hard for you to do for His sake who gave Himself to save you from their bitterest penalties."

"I can see it is no use for me to hope to become a Christian while I stay away from Emma and the baby," he said, very practically; "a man might as well think to become honest while he is stealing a loaf. But it will be dreadfully hard to be one when I'm there!"

"You may expect God to help you when you're in your duty, my boy," I observed.

"But even that seems strange, when my duties come from my sins," he said, pondering.

"No," I answered. "If you are a Christian, God will surely help you to do your duties to save you from more falls and sin. But He does not promise to give you happiness in such duties. Yet remember, He is such a loving God that He often gives more than he promises. Never less."

"Will you go home with me to-morrow?" he asked so pitifully. "It will perhaps keep Emma from saying something that might bring the fiend up in me again just at the first. But yet I oughtn't to trouble you, sir."

"I should be a very poor Christian if I was'nt willing to help a struggling brother if I can," I replied. "I can understand that you want somebody to be your guard against yourself. Remember, you always have such a friend above. But He often helps us by an arm of flesh. I will go with you."

And then we two, the middle-aged man who had been led by such gentle paths, and the young one, so weary with such hard ones, kneeled down, and prayed together before we parted for the night. The dry repressed struggle was over. There were tears now.

He slept in my spare bedroom. And next day as soon as I could despatch my necessary business, we

started off for Croydon. But it was twilight before we reached there, and by the time we turned down the row of inferior houses where they lived, there were lights in almost every window. There was one at theirs. Walter pointed it out to me, with almost a sob, and added, "I'm sure Emmy was very different once." The curtain was not drawn, and we could see into the room as we passed. There was the cot, with the poor, but half-welcome baby in it. There was the tea-table spread disorderly enough, but with toast and jam and such other considerations for creature comfort, as showed the disorder did not arise from any emotional disturbance in the presiding genius. And she herself sat in the arm-chair calmly remodelling a dress, and turning her head on every side to catch the effect of a trimming. I could understand the detoriation that had grown over her. It sat rather loose, like a mask.

I saw Walter's face. I knew what it meant—a wild cry of anguish—a yearning—"if she only seemed to care!"

"For Christ's sake!" I whispered.

He stepped forward, and pushed open the door. It led straight into the parlour. She was startled, and cried out, as some women cry when they see a black beetle. But she recovered her self-possession in a moment, for even such accidental excitement was not in the *rôle* it pleased her to play.

"La, Mr. Sedley," she said in a hard, pert voice, "I thought you was gone for good and all, so I just went round to the Bell and Crown in the High Street, and hired myself as an extra hand for their bar this busy time, and I was putting my things tidy to go in. You've

not had your tea, I suppose? I beg your pardon, sir" (this to me, whom she now observed in the rear), "I suppose you're with Mr. Sedley. Sit down, Sir—leastways I don't think there's a chair clear," and she whipped some clothes from one and set it for me, and threw the garments into the corner.

To satisfy Walter, I stayed and took some tea, but I did not stay much longer. I felt one too many. I could see that Mrs. Sedley resented my presence. And I could also see that however Walter might fear himself, he had no cause to fear. He was too thoroughly humbled and contrite just now to be aggravated by anything his wife might say. He saw me back to the railway station. "Many thanks to you for coming, sir," he said as we shook hands; "if I find it's hard work, I must remember the hardness is my own making, and any strength I may have is all God's free gift."

"And His strength is made perfect in weakness," I rejoined; yet, God forgive me, I could not help thinking the lot before him was over-hard. I scarcely dared to hope that he might hold on. I was so faithless that I forgot that "with men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

Time passed on. I had occasional letters from Walter Sedley, and whenever business brought him to London, he always called in to see me. I was quite satisfied that he had not turned back to the husks and the swine, and was enduring the purgatory of his home-life as best he might. I always made the ordinary inquiries after Mrs. Sedley, but I felt that notwithstanding the confidence so singularly reposed in me, I was not entitled to do more. Once or twice when I had sent some slight present for

the baby, he conveyed a message from "Emma," which I felt sure had gained in civility and kindliness by his translation of it. The baby was a safer subject. I, poor old bachelor, had at first to feign a lively delight in the accounts of her little tricks and sensibleness, and by-and-by to feel some sincere interest in the reports of those strange questions and remarks, which give us some faint echo of God's whisper to the child-soul. There was a second baby in due time—a boy, but the mother had a severe illness, in the course of which the poor infant died. "Emma" herself had a narrow escape, and there was a long and particularly sickly convalescence, in the course of which I was earnestly entreated to do them the honour of a visit, which pressing invitation I could not refuse.

I found Walter looking very thin and worn, almost as ill as his wife, in her coarse black dress, with the poor remains of her golden hair smoothed back under an invalid's cap. He must have had a hard time of it, for they could not hire much assistance. Emma was still too feeble to move about the simplest household duty, but I could not help noticing how her subdued blue eyes followed her husband as he set the tea things and cut the bread and butter. She loved him again now, as she had loved him in the gaudy little sitting-room near Vauxhall Bridge—nay, better, for now I thought there was deprecation instead of vanity in her affection. The softer feeling might pass away again, like the morning dew in the hot sun, but it was something to have been there once and to have returned, even for a time. It might return oftener and oftener. It might grow into a habit of loving, which should draw away nourishment from the older habit of vulgar, selfish display and excitement.

In the course of the evening, Walter had to leave us for a while to discharge some business duty. We sat opposite to each other beside the fire. The little daughter was in her cradle by her mother's side. There was a silence. Emma, as the ex-bar maid, would have talked glibly about something—anything. Emma, this poor, sick women, patiently held her peace.

"What a comfort it must be to Mr. Sedley that you are recovering fairly now!" I said, at last.

Her white lip trembled, and she did not make a direct answer, but remarked, "I'm afraid he is nearly worn out."

"He will not mind that," I rejoined.

She suddenly burst into tears.

"It's a pity for him I didn't die!" she sobbed. "Often and often, when he's thought I was asleep, I've lain and listened to him doing about the house, and I've prayed to God to take me, and leave him free again to do justice to himself. But I hadn't prayed for so long, that I suppose God wouldn't hear me!"

"God hears all our prayers," I said; "but he sends us the answer which He knows we want—not the one which we fancy will suit us. Just as you might go to a physician and ask for such and such a remedy; but if he knew it would be deadly for your disease, he would refuse it, and give you something else. Remember, God has to hear contrary prayers. Depend on it, Walter was praying for your recovery all the while."

"That's just it," she cried, passionately. "He used to be unkind sometimes, and tell me that he'd done the worst thing for himself when he married me, and then I didn't care a bit, and answered back that he'd done it,

and couldn't get out of it, though I'd be precious glad myself if he could. But since he hasn't said a word, and has left off mocking my talk, and scoffing at my dress, I've come to see it all. I see what I've given him to bear, and I can't bear myself! I only wish I could have died—I do!"

"My dear girl," I said, "in times past, you and Mr. Sedley have both made great mistakes, and sinned against each other grievously. Neither of you can help that now. God Himself cannot undo what is done. But though you cannot make a torn garment whole, you can mend it. And you may become very tenderly fond of what has cost you so much trouble, though it may be but a poor, maimed, imperfect thing after all. Walter and you must live to grow patient with each other. And believe me, my dear girl, he is more than patient with you already. St. Paul tells us that patience brings experience, and experience hope."

"I don't know much about the Bible," she sighed, pitifully. "I went to Sunday school once, but I didn't attend much, and I couldn't make out the collects we had to learn."

"I'm sure Walter would be delighted to read with you," I said. "It is early days with him yet, though the latest scholar is often not the lowest in God's school. You will help your husband if you will let him help you, dear Mrs. Sedley."

Here Walter's return interrupted our conversation, and it was time for me to go home. As he and I tramped through the dark lanes together, I must confess I betrayed a little of Emma's confidence, just enough to help him quickly to understand any timid overture that

she might make, which a slight hesitation might drive back, not easily to advance again.

My next news of them was startling. They were all going abroad—to Australia. Emma was not very strong yet, but the doctor had admitted that the long sea voyage would set her up rather than harm her. They were going rather suddenly, with the brother of Walter's present employer, who was sure he could easily place Walter in his settlement. They would come into London, bag and baggage, only the evening before their final departure. Might they hope to see me at the Docks in the early morning? Or if not, would I excuse their calling at my chambers at such an unreasonable hour as nine o'clock in the evening?

I gave them an invitation to supper—and I resolved to go to the Docks as well. And so they spent their last evening in their native country with me. Not a sorrowful evening, though as solemn as most last times are. It was wonderful to see the light buoyant manliness of Walter's face and figure. And it was touching to observe how poor Emma did not seem to fear him, and yet made earnest little efforts to keep her grammar straight! They were going to begin again. The fresh wide ocean would roll between them and the sordid, blighted past. And as I waved them my last farewell, in that mystic morning light that transforms our practical London into a fairy city, and thought of the crimes and follies that spring so rankly and irrepressibly in our hot, crowded over-civilisation, I almost felt the healing breezes from the green savannahs far away, and once more thanked God for that precious assurance which we are so prone to forget, that "He is faithful, and will not suffer you to

be tempted above that ye are able : but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

I heard from Walter regularly. There was always affectionate mention made of Emma, but gradually I noticed she was less often named, and instead the pronoun "I" was changed for the plural "we." In process of time, the births of two sons were chronicled, one named after his father, and the other christened "Edward Garrett." They were prosperous people, and I caught glimpses of life of that free, primitive kind, which suited the noble, generous impulses of Walter's nature, and gave his wife opportunity to grow to his level without submitting to degrading humiliation in the meantime. Once and again Walter mentioned the missing Harry. He had caused inquiries to be set on foot about this lost brother, but with no result. I proffered such services as were in my power, as a resident in that great centre where the fugitive was most likely to turn up sooner or later. And more than once, the officials we employed trotted me off to see dead or dying outcasts who might be the person I was interested in. For a long time, all was in vain. But at last I was taken to a workhouse to see a man who had fallen down ill in the casual ward a few days before. He had used that casual ward several times, and had given different names, and the clue was, that one of these aliases was Sedley.

He was a wretched object—a living mass of diseases and abomination. "As thorough a suicide as if he had cut his own throat," said the plain-speaking parish doctor. But is was very near the end now. His ear was almost dull in death. "He's almost forgotten how to speak

truth, it's grown more natural to tell lies, even without an object," whispered my companion, the doctor; "we must come upon him sharply.—Henry Sedley, were you not born at Croydon?"

"Who said I was Henry Sedley?" muttered the dying man. "I entered my name last time as Griffin Death." He had really done so, in fiendish and ghastly jest.

"We know you are Henry Sedley," pursued the unruffled practitioner. "Now, you might as well own it at once. It can't matter to you now, and it seems it 'll be some satisfaction to a brother of yours. It's truest kindness to speak sharp to such," he added aside; "it makes up their minds for 'em, and settles 'em at once."

"Walter!" exclaimed the sick man, and there was a touch of genuine emotion in his tone as he breathed the name, but it died into the old reckless defiance as he went on—"What! Walter's living yet, is he? Afraid I shan't be much credit to him. Sorry I've got no will to put him in, poor old boy!"

"Haven't you any message to send to your brother?" I said, speaking at last. "He won't care for anything else, if he may only have some hope for you."

"Hope—for me!," he echoed. "What's the good of talking rubbish? I wish you'd hold your tongues, and go and get me allowed a drop of gin or brandy, or something of that sort. Hope—for me! Why, I've never had a single chance!"

He did not speak again, and died that night.

O it was sad, sad to send such a story over the sea. But it had to be done. Walter wrote back and thanked me for the trouble I had taken. That was all. He made no further allusion to poor Harry.

The last winter that I was in London I heard a tall, robust, squire-like man, asking for me in the warehouse. The boy brought in his name as Mr. Sedley. It was actually Walter! He had brought over his whole family to take a look at mother-country. They had put up at an old-fashioned city hotel not far off, and there Walter led me that very evening. There was Mrs. Sedley, with the golden hair nearly grey, and a matronly, hospitable manner, and a pleasant smile, though I noticed there came a grave look upon her face whenever she was not speaking. And there was the young Emma, a slender, pretty girl, and there was the rather precocious young heir, and there was my chubby name-sake! And didn't we have a sociable evening! "Rather," in the phraseology of Walter Sedley, Jun., aged twelve.

I saw a good deal of them during their month's stay in the old land. I took the young ones about and showed them the sights. And they told me lots of news. How fond they were of their father—how fond everybody was of him. How he liked to go down to the ships and look after the emigrants that came in. How many people there were in Sydney, and in Melbourne, and about the country, who said they owed everything to him. How there was no church near the farm. But there was service every Sunday in their great kitchen. "Papa prays, and reads, and speaks a little himself," said Emma, "unless there's somebody staying with us, or with some of the neighbours, that he says can do it better. But I don't think anybody does it better, sir. We've seen some of the convicts crying while papa has been praying, haven't we, Watty? We have some convicts about our place. There is one, Brown Jack they

call him, nobody could ever manage him till papa. And now he'll mind papa's very look. I think Brown Jack would die for papa. You know, sir, papa is so kind—and he always seems so sure that God will help everybody to be good, if they'll only try. Brown Jack used to say he couldn't even try. But papa always said he could, and he had long talks with Jack, and Jack is quite different now. I say papa must be one of the best men in the world, such as he says you are, sir."

"Well, my dear," I said, "it is something in our favour when anybody loves us well enough to say so."

Walter Sedley and his wife were certainly happy at last. But let nobody think that their follies and sins had left no sorrowful trace behind. They had sowed bitterness, and they must reap some of it, although they had sowed other seeds since, which had brought forth abundant harvest. Apart, they each mourned to me that a day must come when their children would ask questions and learn truths which would, at the very least, mingle pity in their reverent love for both their parents. Nay, if the loss could have been all their own, they would have borne it gladly. But they were ready to cry, "Lo, we have sinned, and we have done wickedly; but these what have they done?" For would there be no feeling of humiliation for these innocents? The bitterest pang for a saved sinner is, that some of the temporal penalty of his misdoings must fall on others beside himself. And yet, as they thought of their two lives, ransomed in a double sense—the wrecks that seemed only fit to spread moral pestilence about them, purified and raised to do good work in God's world, they bravely took up the cross that must remain to the end, and thankfully acknowl-

edged, "Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this."

And as I once more waved farewell to them—our last farewell on earth—there came into my mind sundry sweet passages of Holy Writ :—

"Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive : and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee."

"Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption ; for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back."

And as I met the crowds of sad, stained faces pouring through the city streets, my heart yearned towards them in some dim semblance of His great love who pleads—

"Come, now, and let us reason together : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as WHITE AS SNOW."

THE END.

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